ENGAGING WITH YOUR CHILD: A WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS EXPERIENCING DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

MELISSA YANITSKI

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MELISSA YANITSKI

Approved:

Supervisor: Noella Piquette, Ph.D. Date

Committee Member: Bonnie Lee, Ph.D. Date

Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies and Research in Education: Kerry Bernes, Ph.D. Date

Dedication

To all the resilient children of divorce and their parents, keep moving forward. Keep hope alive; things will improve. If you take away one message from this workshop, it is that there is always HOPE!

To my parents, Norman and Betty, thank you for your support throughout my masters. I would not be where I am without your help and encouragement in moving to Lethbridge. Thank you for being magnificent parents!

To my sister Natasha, thank you for being the person I can turn to for a laugh late in the evening or a movie to relax on the weekend.

To my dearest friends, thank you for teaching me what true friendship is about. Thank you for all the encouragement without judgement. I could not have done this without you!

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Abstract

During divorce the well-being of the child may decrease because of reduced household income, changes in the home situation, and increased stress levels, which can create emotional, behavioural, and educational problems. This project focuses on providing parents with the tools to help their children navigate through divorce using attachment theory and developmental theories, as well as builds on the child's individual resources. This tool consists of a psycho-educational workshop based on an extensive literature review incorporating best practices for families undergoing divorce proceedings. The workshop provides hands-on activities and knowledge for parents to use to strengthen the parent-child relationship. This workshop is designed to aid parents, counsellors, children, and public policy by targeting families experiencing divorce.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview of Project

This final project has been created to provide information to divorcing parents on how to connect with their child and help their child through the divorce process. The author expects that this PowerPoint workshop can be provided to parents as a free, short-term, and easy to access intervention for divorcing families to reduce and even eliminate potential lasting damage that may occur in some families due to divorce and separation. This chapter presents the outline for this final project through an introduction to the problem of divorce, the purpose of this final project, and then the rationale for the parent education workshop is presented. Following the rationale section, a brief background in the literature review and methodology for the project is reviewed. Next, there is an overview of the parent workshop, followed by a discussion of the potential implications of the parental education workshop.

Background to the Problem

Commencing in the early 1980s, divorce became more common in North America, with researchers and policy makers quickly turning their attention to dealing with this social phenomenon (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). While the divorce rate is not currently at the level it was in the mid 1980s, there is an increase in people getting divorced within Canada (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 2010). At this time, it is estimated that four in ten Canadian marriages will end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2012b). In 2008 the main reasons for a legal divorce in Canada were separation, cheating, as well as physical and psychological abuse (Milan, 2013). It is clear that with such high levels of divorce in North America, many children will feel the effects of a parental divorce in their lifetime.

The impact of divorce on children. In divorce, the adjustment to the altered family structure can cause varying levels of stress in the children of divorce (Angarne-Lindberg, Wadsby, & Bertero, 2009). Children who have coping skills, support from their families and friends, and access to therapeutic interventions tend to do better after a divorce, as these tools can act as protective factors after a divorce (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). As well, when children feel protected and connected to the changing family unit, divorce can have a positive outcome (Angarne-Lindberg et al., 2009). In the instances where divorce has a long-term effect, some of the major complications that can impact the children include emotional, behavioural, and educational problems, such as loss of emotional support and disruptions in parent-child relationships (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cartwright, 2006). The general well-being of the child may also be changed due to financial problems, changes in their home situation, and increased stress levels (Beausang, Farrell, & Walsh, 2012; Moxnes, 2003).

While divorce is so prevalent in society, it is important not to forget that the majority of children can navigate through the divorce process with no lasting negative effects, no diagnosable difficulties (Clark, 2013) and become productive adults (Storksen, Roysamb, Holmen, & Tambs, 2005). This project concentrates on mediating potential negative effects that some of the families and children could have due to a divorce, by strengthening their communication and attachment skills as it is recognized that for some children and parents, the process can create negative impacts.

Divorce often affects the parenting quality and the parent's ability to respond to children's needs (Stallman & Sanders, 2007). One of the best predictors of a child's well-

being post-divorce is the quality of parental functioning (Amato, 2000). In particular, parents need to be educated on these effects and how to support and stay connected with their child or children. Other protective factors for child well-being after divorce consist of improving parenting quality, improving parent–child relationships, and eliminating high conflict interactions between parents (Clark, 2013); therefore, targeting parenting is one way to implement prevention and early intervention to help with the transition to create a stable and loving home for the children and reduce risk factors associated with divorce.

Parental education classes. A popular way to support children through divorce is by educating parents, as this provides parents with the tools to help the child through the divorce process via enhancing protective factors such as feelings of security, good parenting, positive parent-child interactions, positive attachment, self-esteem, parents can be a large part of the solution to mitigating possible negative effects of the divorce (Stallman & Sanders, 2007). According to Fackrell, Hawkins, and Kay (2011) they found that parents who participated in parental education programs were 50% better off than those who did not participate in the areas of parent-child relationships, child-well-being, and parent well-being. Thus parental education programs are encouraging from a public policy standpoint.

Bowers, Mitchell, Hardesty, and Hughes Jr (2011) highlight the fact that there is often a disconnect between theory, research, and practice in the psychoeducational courses offered to divorcing parents. The Parenting After Separation (PAS) course offered in Alberta provides detailed information on divorce, but does not spend time discussing how to put the main principals into practice. This is where improvements can

be made to existing programs to include a focus on applying the theory and research to assist parents in helping their children navigate through the separation. In particular, through the use of attachment principles and developmental theory as the theoretical framework, engagement can be increased between parent and children during the divorce process. It is necessary for parents to understand their child's development as well as their relationship with their child in order to promote resiliency (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Attachment. Relationships are at the centre of attachment and understanding attachment is essential to connecting with one's own child (Neufeld & Mate, 2004). It is helpful for parents interested in supporting their children through the divorce process to have an understanding of what attachment is and how to continue to foster the attachment bond they have created, as quality parenting is an essential resource, acting as a protective factor for the child during the divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Parents influence attachment through showing warmth, responsiveness, listening, and behaving in a consistent manner (Family Justice Services, 2011; Neufeld & Mate, 2004; Pedro-Carroll, 2010). According to attachment theory, ways to keep the attachment bond strong include: physical proximity, sameness, belonging, significance, emotional intimacy, and being known (Neufeld & Mate, 2004).

Theories of child development. Like the attachment bond, having knowledge of theories of child development can equip parents with the skills to respond to their child's needs and support their child through the separation process. Insight into what the child may be thinking, feeling, and experiencing helps the parent talk with and interact with their child at a developmentally appropriate level. Additionally, it is important to consider children's developmental stages as educators and counsellors to have a working

knowledge of where children are at developmentally in order to tailor interventions to children in each developmental stage. As well, it is important to understand basic child development in order to catch any possible developmental delays.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to locate best practice evidence on parent/child interaction that will further develop, enable, and encourage attachment with their child during the process of a marital breakup. It is clear that the connection between parent and child is paramount to the child's ability to function in response to everyday life stressors during and after a divorce, as children spend a great deal of time with their parents and rely on them for care. To thoroughly support children through divorce, parents need to be equipped with the proper communication tools to provide that support as they are the caregivers with the most contact and thus can make the largest impact. These essential communication skills, knowledge regarding attachment, and positive childhood experiences will be foundational elements of the literature review.

The secondary purpose of this project is to use the best practice evidence located during an extensive literature review and use this information to shape a counsellor driven workshop. Trained counsellors will deliver this parent education workshop to individuals undergoing divorce, complete with group based activities and individual homework activities. The focus of the literature review and workshop is on elementary school aged children, roughly six to eleven years of age in order to address these specific developmental features, needs, and support strategies for that age group. This final project and accompanying workshop is intended to address the need for psychoeducational programs that concentrate on the cognitive, social, emotional, and

physical needs of children experiencing divorce (Cartwright, 2006). As identified in the literature, this workshop will meet the need for hands-on and practical knowledge for parents experiencing divorce and separation (Bowers et al., 2011).

The goal of this workshop is to foster continued secure attachment between children and their caregivers. Without this attachment, children will be more likely to suffer from the negative effects of divorce (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). The workshop focuses on helping parents achieve comfort in talking with their children on the topic of divorce, providing space for feelings, and above all maintaining the connection between parent and child. While other psychoeducational programs cover a broad over-view of legal issues, parental conflict, as well as how divorce affects the family members, this workshop is designed to concentrate on the parent-child relationship as it is one of the main predictors of success post-divorce (Clark, 2013; Fackrell et al., 2011).

Rationale for Supporting Children of Divorce

Due to the prevalence of divorce in Canada and the United States, it is important to constantly be updating programming to support parents and children experiencing divorce. Programming in Alberta currently includes support groups such as Rainbows (Starfish Family Resources, n.d.) and Parachute group (Strathcona County, n.d.) that aim to help children feel less alone and teach coping strategies, as well as parental education programs such as Parenting After Separation (PAS) (Family Justice Services, 2011) offered by the Alberta Courts. Courses such as PAS cover topics: understanding the legal system, creating a parenting plan, co-parenting skills, and understanding how children at different ages respond to divorce (Family Justice Services, 2011).

Researchers Fraley and Heffernan (2013) outline the possible impact divorce can have on parent-child relationships and display how essential it is for parents to focus on maintaining the attachment bond with their child to help promote resiliency. Children will look to their parents for support and the parent needs to be able to provide that security (Neufeld & Mate, 2004); this is where the workshop will come in providing the basic concepts for parents to use to assist the family unit in adjustment. The workshop focuses on maintaining the attachment bond between parent and child during divorce and supporting the child through the divorce.

Significance of this Project

With a high prevalence of divorce in Canada and the United States, continual research on interventions for parents and children experiencing divorce is necessary to maintain best-practices. Support groups and divorcing parental education programs are examples of interventions created to address the potentially negative effects of divorce. This project was undertaken to create a useful resource to help parents navigate through the transition of separation and divorce.

Through providing parents with the skills to talk to and engage with their children, the potential negative effects associated with divorce can be decreased to better help the children of divorce (Cartwright, 2006). The compiled research and tools supply a hands-on approach for parents and practitioners to use with children who are navigating divorce. Research based interventions and programs that aid parents and their children through the process of divorce are essential to reduce the possible lasting effects of psychological difficulties experienced by parents and their children (Stallman & Sanders, 2007).

According to Fackrell et al. (2011) parental education programs for divorcing parents are valuable and justify increasing support and continuation. They found that parents who participated in parental education programs were 50% better off than those who did not participate in the areas of parent-child relationships, child-well-being, and parent well-being. Even a small improvement in parent-child relationships in areas such as warmth and attentive parenting leads to better outcomes of children of divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Thus parental education programs are encouraging from a public policy standpoint (Fackrell et al., 2011).

The final project and parent-focused workshop focused on informing counselling professionals of helpful strategies to teach parents who are in or have completed a divorce. Elements from the workshop could be used in individual or family counselling sessions. The hands-on activities may provide beneficial strategies to engage parents in session and provide them with practical strategies to take home. The overall goal and ultimate usefulness of this project and accompanying workshop is to impact and strengthen the parent-child relationship, which in turn has the potential to strengthen the child's mental and physical well-being and adjustment post-divorce.

Statement of Personal Interest

My interest in this subject matter of supporting communication and attachment between children and parents throughout divorce is two-fold. I have had direct experience working with children and parents who are undergoing a divorce. As an undergraduate student I volunteered as a facilitator for Strathcona County Family and Community Services Parachute divorce support group. I found the experience to be very enlightening about what divorce was really like for children, as I had never personally felt the effects

of a divorce. I was able to see how the group provided the children with a safe space to discuss their parents' divorce with other children going through the same emotions and experiences. Seeing this group in action made me want to further investigate how to support children through divorce.

Then during my graduate counselling practicum I had the chance to work with families who were going through separation or had been divorced for some time. Seeing how important the parent-child relationship truly is to family functioning, I knew this was the direction I wanted to look into to create resources to improve family cohesiveness, particularly through parents and their children.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the process that I underwent in creating my final project for the Master of Education in Counselling Psychology. The project entailed creating a divorcing parents parental education program in the form of a PowerPoint and activities. The workshop targets divorcing and separating parents of elementary school aged children. This project has the potential to positively impact children and their families, as parents will have the resources and tools to better connect with their children and improve the parent-child relationship to reduce the negative effects associated with divorce. This workshop is also a useful tool for therapists to use in session with individuals and families to strengthen the attachment bond between parent and child in divorcing families.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Divorce is a process that begins when the couple is married, then separated, and finally a legal divorce (Amato, 2010). Divorce has been of interest to researchers since the 1980s, when the divorce rate began to increase drastically (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). This upheaval in the family system can cause varying levels of turmoil. Some children may have an increased general level of well-being, others experience problems for a short period of time, while a third group experiences life-long difficulties stemming from the divorce. Children who have coping skills, support from their families and friends, and access to therapeutic interventions tend to do better after a divorce. Many of the major problems associated with divorce are loss of emotional support, financial difficulties, moving (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), and disruptions in parent-child relationships (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). The literature review will explore the issue of divorce and its effects on the children of divorce in the literature over the last thirty years to the present, followed by an in-depth look at child development and attachment theory, as they will be the theoretical basis for this project. Finally, interventions will be briefly looked at culminating in a focus on parental education as a tool to decrease the possible negative effects of divorce.

Scope and Prevalence of Divorce

Since the 1980s, divorce has become more and more prevalent in Canada and the USA, with much research undertaken to better understand the effects of these divorces (Amato, 2010). In the United States of America, over half of all marriages end in divorce. With a staggering statistic like this, divorce is of the utmost importance in analyzing social trends and social problems. The statistics are 3.6 out of every 1000 people will

divorce as compared to the 6.8 out of 1000 people that will marry (National Center for Health Statistics, 2010). In Canada, 41% of Canadians will divorce before they reach 30 years of marriage (Statistics Canada, 2012b). This value is up from over 1/3 in 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2005). These numbers are slightly lower than the American statistics, but they do not imply that divorce is any less of a problem in Canada. Divorce needs to be continually studied to see how this social phenomenon affects Canadian citizens.

In 2001 Statistics Canada found that 23% of Canadian's first marriages ended in divorce, with the mean age of divorce for men in Canada at 44.0 years of age and 41.4 for females (Statistics Canada, 2005). Between the mean ages of 41 and 44, many couples are likely to have school aged children; thus many Canadian children are likely to be involved in a divorce or separation.

According to Statistics Canada, between the years 2001 to 2005, the divorce rate in Alberta and Canada remained fairly constant at around respectively 8,000 and 71, 000 divorces annually. As of 2012, the number of people in Canada who divorced went up by 102,892 people since 2008, with a total of 1,690,074 divorced and 767,550 separated individuals in Canada. That is approximately 7% of the total Canadian population in 2012 that were divorced or separated. In like manner, within Alberta a total of 185,444 people were divorced in the year 2012 making divorce a national concern as well as a provincial concern. This project will focus on a population from within Alberta, which has the fourth highest number of divorces in the country after Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2012a).

Longitudinal studies have shown that reliable interpersonal predictors of divorce are domestic violence, conflict, infidelity, as well as decreased levels of trust and love

(Amato, 2010). According to Statistics Canada, the main reasons stated for the dissolution of a marriage in 2008 were separation of at least a year (93.6%), adultery (3.7%), mental cruelty (1.6%), and physical cruelty (1.2%) (Milan, 2013). With high levels of divorce in Canada, many families will feel the effects of a parental divorce in their lifetime.

Long-Term Effects of Divorce

Many empirical studies have looked at the effects of divorce from the perspective of the adult children years after the divorce has happened. Most of these studies on the effects of divorce were longitudinal to determine effects change over time or cross-sectional to compare children from divorced families to children of intact families (Amato, 1994, 2010). Some studies looked at the specific experiences of a group of adult children through life-story interviewing (Cartwright, 2006), while other studies used surveys given to the adult children of divorce (Amato, 1999; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Wauterickx, Gouwy, & Bracke, 2006). Adult participants were targeted in these quantitative studies to look at the long-term effect of their childhood experiences of divorce. These studies with adult children of divorce identified many of their current adult problems as stemming from the divorce (Cartwright, 2006) and that poor outcomes associated with divorce may persist into adulthood (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Emotional well-being. As adults, children of divorce may report low levels of psychological well-being, affecting their self-esteem, emotional coping, as well as current and new relationships. Well-being has been shown to decrease with the number of family transitions that have occurred over the course of each adult's lives. Each divorce and

remarriage the child/adult is exposed to decreased the overall functioning of the adult (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Specifically, adult children of divorce have identified that they have lower self-esteem after going through a divorce. Their self-concept is often changed, which contributed to decreased psychological well-being (Cartwright, 2006). One way to target low self-esteem is through improving attachment to parents through unconditional positive regard which fosters improved self-esteem (Neufeld & Mate, 2004). Some of the most common problems identified in the adult children of divorce are emotional problems (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Specifically, the participants discussed feeling increased anger and jealousy (Amato, 2000; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Cartwright, 2006).

Relationship difficulties. Many studies have looked at the participant's own perception of the divorce and how it affected their lives (Angarne-Lindberg et al., 2009; Cartwright, 2006; Thomas & Woodside, 2011). These qualitative approaches allowed the adult children to tell their particular experience of divorce. Most participants found that they were currently or had at one time negative results due to the divorce, in particular difficulties in personal relationships. The adult children of divorce stated they were worried about their ability to maintain long-term relationships in the future as they have not been able to have successful relationships presently (Cartwright, 2006). Adult children have elucidated that increased rates of divorce are due to relationship problems rather than increased acceptance of divorce, as once thought (Amato, 1996; Cartwright, 2006). Whereas, difficulties experienced in parental relationships were found to be common and to be due to things such as loss of contact, loss of trust, loss of respect, and an inability to relate to each other (Amato, 1996, 1999; Cartwright, 2006). These findings

coincide as divorce affects the child's ability to spend time with and bond with the parent that they may no longer live with creating weakened parental bonds (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Positive effects of divorce. On the other hand, many children of divorce do not experience any of the above negative emotional effects; instead, they were able to form supportive and enjoyable intimate relationships and they maintained contact with their parents (Cartwright, 2006). At times, divorce was found to increase the adult child of divorce's well-being as the level of conflict they were exposed to decreased (Amato, 2000). The children may feel better after the divorce as there is less family conflict. The child may feel more comfortable and less anxious now that one parent has moved out (Hogan, Halpenny, & Greene, 2003). Children can also be comfortable with the end result if they have a better life post-divorce, if they received sufficient support throughout the process, and if the parents handled the divorce in a positive manner (Angarne-Lindberg et al., 2009).

Effects of Divorce on Children

It is important to remember that divorce does not affect each child the exact same way and that most children will not experience lasting difficulties (Stallman & Sanders, 2007). The age, sex, support network, and parental relationships both pre and post-divorce all have an effect on how the divorce may or may not impact the child (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005). The greater the series of transitions after the divorce, the more the children will be affected (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). As well, chronic stress and uncertainty over how divorce will change the child's life are prominent factors in determining the level of distress and lasting damage that a child will experience (Bryce, 2001). The main

resiliency factors associated with divorce are being able to manage parental conflict, deal with emotions, and parent well. With these factors children do well through the divorce process (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

The major struggles that children may have while dealing with the divorce are loss of the non-custodial parent, lower standard of living, and being put in the middle between their two parents. The before mentioned problems may contribute to other larger health, academic, and relationship difficulties (Cartwright, 2006). The following sections on: overall well-being, loss of income, moving, altered family structure, and information flow discuss in greater detail the possible effects of divorce on children.

Overall well-being. As reinforced in Pedro-Carroll (2010), it was found that children of divorce often have decreased well-being and increased levels of problems as compared to children from intact parent families. The well-being of children of divorce often decreased as a direct result of poverty, parental conflict, and stress due to the divorce (Moxnes, 2003). Psychological distress has been found along with more use of mental health services among adult children of divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Children felt the negative effects of divorce when they are used to pass messages between their parents and used as a pawn between their parents (Butler, Scanlan, Douglas, Murch, & Robinson, 2002). The child may have experienced eating and/or sleep disturbances (Pedro-Carroll, 2010), headaches, stomach aches, crying, and sleeping in class as a result of the upheaval and stress at home (Amato, 2000). Academic problems often became an issue as children had trouble concentrating in class due to the many changes in their lives, that they are unsure how to process. Their mental health problems may have contributed

to their academic problems, as sleeping and eating disturbances will affect school work (Beausang et al., 2012; O'Rourke & Worzbyt, 1996).

Emotional difficulties during divorce (Beausang et al., 2012; Moxnes, 2003) such as increased levels of anger and sadness in children were common effects (Moxnes, 2003). Crying served as an emotional outlet for the child's influx of feelings, but this was often done alone and in private (Butler et al., 2002). Children who learned how to identify and work through emotions felt in control and more empathic, on the contrary, depression and anxiety may develop in children who are unable to deal with the strong emotions they are experiencing (Joly, Girard, & Lewis, 2012). Butler et al. (2002) found that children did not want to see their parents unhappy, so they avoided the topic of divorce. In doing this, the children became emotional caretakers of their parents. Other signs of stress manifested through unpredictable meltdowns and difficulty being away from parents (Pedro-Carroll, 2010); as it was a common worry of school age children going through divorce that when one parent leaves, they will not return. In order to cope with all the emotions and change in their lives, children distracted themselves with games, music, and sports.

Loss of income. When a family is experiencing divorce, in addition to changes in emotional or psychological well-being there is often a financial strain as the same or even less income is now split between two family units; this decrease in income is often exacerbated when mothers have been out of the workforce for some time, have little work experience, are not receiving child support, or are unskilled, resulting in lower paying or even part-time jobs. According to the children themselves, they did not perceive the loss of income to be negative; instead, they tried to take responsibility for their new situation

by saying they were no longer interested in expensive extra-curricular activities they used to participate in. They also tended to do a lot more work around the house in order to contribute to the family's survival. The children that did not register that the family had less money and who did not become involved in helping the family strongly felt the negative effects of decreased family income (Moxnes, 2003).

Moving. As a result of the decrease in family income, many separating families need to move into new, less expensive homes. In a qualitative study of 30 kids between the ages of 8 and 12, 41% of the children had moved as a result of the divorce (Hogan et al., 2003). The stress associated with moving led to negative social consequences for children of divorce (Beausang et al., 2012; Moxnes, 2003). Children have identified one of their most prominent fears as having to leave their friends and their school (Butler et al., 2002). The child may have moved into a new area where they have no friends and had to navigate a new school alone. The process of leaving behind old friends and trying to find new friends can lead to social isolation. In contrast, the children who kept in contact with their friends adjusted better to the move (Hogan et al., 2003; Moxnes, 2003).

Altered family structure. As discussed above, as a family divorces, one parent must move into a new home and the children often have two homes that they split their time between. The children highlighted moving between two homes as very difficult as they have to pack bags all the time and it disrupts their daily family routine (Butler et al., 2002). Many children have seen less contact with one parent as a positive result due to decreased conflict and decreased anxiety in the household. Other children are used to having less contact with the non-custodial parent, so the lack of contact is nothing new. The children who had the most difficult time are the ones who did not understand why

they no longer see the other parent as much (Hogan et al., 2003; Moxnes, 2003). The other two conditions that made divorce problematic for the child were if the change was sudden or if there was less contact with one of the child's parents (Hogan et al., 2003; Moxnes, 2003). This is especially true if before the divorce the parent and child had a close relationship (Moxnes, 2003). Overall, if the parent-child relationship before the divorce was high quality, then the relationship can act as a protective factor (Amato, 2010).

Another change associated with any divorce is the possible addition of step-parents. Children have expressed that it was easier to accept the step-parent if they were slowly introduced and given time to adjust to the new person in their lives. The process was often much more difficult with the spouse of the non-custodial parent, as the children perceived this new person as taking stealing time with and love from their parent (Butler et al., 2002; Moxnes, 2003).

Information flow. Besides experiencing decreased well-being, loss of income, a moving, and altered family structure, the children perceived the divorce as a crisis. In the study by Butler et al. (2002) one-third of the children shared that they believed no one had told them about the divorce directly. On the other hand, all the parents of these children reported that they told their child about the divorce. There appeared to be a disconnect between what the parents reported doing and how the child remembered or perceived the flow of information. In addition, the children said that they did not think they could bring up the topic of divorce with their parents; therefore, they avoided the topic even when they would have liked more information about the divorce (Butler et al., 2002). If communication between parent and child about the divorce was not clear, then

school age children age often blamed themselves for the divorce (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Children need to be told that divorce is an adult problem that they cannot fix. Children reported doing best when they were told about the divorce and what will happen to them, but not all the details.

Interventions for Families Experiencing Divorce

While not all families experiencing divorce require intervention, for the families require help there are multiple widely available options. The following portion of this literature review will focus on the use of support groups, individual and family therapy, and parental education programs as ways to help parents and children with divorce. These tools provide helping professionals with resources to aid divorcing families.

Support groups as intervention. Support groups are designed as a source of information and emotional support for people dealing with common sources of stress (Galinsky & Schopler, 1995). Members create a supportive, safe environment in order to foster learning and sharing (Tichon, 2015). The most common uses for both adult and children's support groups are for addiction, mental illness, domestic violence, divorce, imprisonment(Skerfving, Johansson, & Elgán, 2014), parenting support (Nieuwboer, Fukkink, & Hermanns, 2013), and many others. In general, there are more topics being covered by various forms of support groups (Tichon, 2015). An example in the Edmonton area is the Prism group, a ten week divorce support group offered for parents on a drop-in basis (Strathcona County, n.d.).

The use of groups with children of divorce is intuitive as many families are single parent families and therefore are unable to afford private therapy. In these groups, the activities are designed to increase the children's self-confidence, self-worth, as well as

coping strategies while working towards the main goal of decreasing the any possible negative effects associated with well-being (Skerfving et al., 2014); this may be via stories, books, games, role-plays, or even videos. For example, by reading a book out-loud in a group about feelings, the children learn how to talk about and express their feelings. The group format is ideal in that children will often open up more to kids going through similar experiences (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). As with all interventions, support groups are not appropriate for every child; children with personality problems, social skill problems, or who are in crisis may need one on one counselling (O'Rourke & Worzbyt, 1996).

The main way to improve life for children of divorce is to provide them with information about the divorce so that they understand what is happening. The children want to know what the divorce means for their life and how their family may change. In addition, the idea that divorce is not the child's fault and that things will be better in the future need to be stressed (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). By being a part of a group where everyone has been through a divorce or separation, the children can see that they are not alone and that nothing is wrong with them. It helps to normalize their feelings (Bodnar, 2012).

It is important to acknowledge that an 8 to 10 week group will not solve all of the children's problems. It is just a starting point to deal with the effects of parental divorce. There are many variations of children's divorce support groups that cover many of the before mentioned topics. Some local examples of these divorce support groups include: Rainbows (Starfish Family Resources, n.d.) and Parachute group (Strathcona County, n.d.).

Individual and family therapy as intervention. Family therapy is another option for families experiencing conflict during the divorce or separation process. In the family therapy approach, the work at times is individual or in small groups with different family members brought together to increase communication in the newly created system. Often a large portion of the family therapy is psychoeducation on the general effects of divorce, with a focus on how to avoid putting children in the middle of parenting disputes. Another focus of family therapy is to help create new narratives within the larger family system. The goal is to create stories that centre on healing, building, and growing instead of around loss and ending. Family therapy has been shown to increase cooperation between divorcing parents as well as promote healthy development in children. While family therapy can improve familial relationships in divorce, it is not a sure thing. Some relationships are more difficult to heal, such as those between ex-spouses (McConville, 2013).

Parental education as intervention. Besides therapy and support groups for both parents and children, one of the most common interventions available to divorcing families are parental education programs (Amato, 2010; Hans & Fine, 2001). In the United States 46 states use mandated parental education classes (Pollet & Lombregalia, 2008). As well in Canada, all ten provinces and three territories offer a parental education program for divorcing families (information gathered by author). Some of the key characteristics present in interventions for divorcing parents are multiple levels of intervention, active participation in skills training, knowledgeable and experienced facilitators, applicable content, and engaging and effective teaching strategies (Stallman & Sanders, 2007). Parental education classes aim to increase the knowledge of parents in

order to drastically decrease the effects of divorce. These classes varied in length from one to 36 hours according to a meta-analysis by Fackrell et al. (2011). The main messages centre around creating low-conflict co-parenting, understanding the legal system, parental relationship quality, as well as understanding how children experience divorce (Fackrell et al., 2011; Family Justice Services, 2011; Geasler & Blaisure, 1995). Divorcing parental education programs have been growing in number, while methodological studies have been few (Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon, 1997; Fackrell et al., 2011; McKenry, Clark, & Stone, 1999; Sigal, Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 2011).

An example of a psychoeducational group for divorcing parents is Parenting After Separation (PAS) offered by the Government of Alberta. It is a free, voluntary, six hour course offered by the Alberta Family Justice for parents separating. The manual is available online for all to access. The Alberta Government has also created Parenting After Separation for Families in High Conflict (PASHC) and Focus on Communication in Separation (FOCIS) to decrease the negative effects of divorce for families and society (Family Justice Services, 2011).

Divorcing parents' education programs have numerous benefits to parents, children, and society. A major benefit discovered in meta-analysis by Fackrell et al. (2011) on effectiveness of divorce education was that parents who were a part of a divorce program were 50% better off than those who did not participate. As well, the quality, warmth, and engagement saw improvement in the parent child relationships (Fackrell et al., 2011). These are important findings as strong, quality, consistent, and warm parent-child relationships are essential for positive outcomes post-divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Sigal et al., 2011). With the benefits associated with

psychoeducational courses, it is necessary to continue to increase support for these programs.

Empirical Studies on Divorce Support Interventions

While evaluation of existing divorce interventions have shown benefits to families experiencing separation, as discussed in the previous section, program evaluations are still needed for many support groups currently in use (Abel, Chung-Canine, & Broussard, 2013). As well, evaluation of parental education programs used across North American is needed as not enough research is being done in this area. Below is a thematic approach to both the positive and negative outcomes of interventions used with families experiencing divorce.

Behavioural improvements. Parental education classes for divorce have been found to improve child well-being in the areas of behaviour and overall adjustment to the divorce (Fackrell et al., 2011). According to Malcore, Windell, Seyuin, and Hill (2010) they found that 90% of participants in the parental education program improved their knowledge of how conflict can negatively affect their children and improved their knowledge and skills of how to help children through divorce. Abel et al. (2013) created a quasi-experimental study that compared children in the KidsKonnect program to children on a waitlist in the Southern United States. They had the children's teachers and parents fill out pre and post group assessments of behavioural indicators. They found that the treatment group showed enhanced attending behaviours and social skills over the waitlisted group which showed no statistical improvement. The above study provides some efficacy to divorce interventions, but more empirical studies still need to be completed.

The rainbows support group has been difficult to study because of confidentiality issues and the cost of research for a charitable organization. In a study by Michaela (2006), 2235 Rainbows participants worldwide were given a seven question survey. The study found that the support group helped to provide change for children ages 5 to 13 (as cited in Dorian, 2012, pp. 1-2). A private study by Kramer and Laumann (2001) found that parents and facilitators reported enhanced coping skills, problem solving skills, and understanding of feelings. The children felt less alone and that they could better understand and deal with their feelings (as cited in Dorian, 2012, p. 1). According to Kramer and Laumann (2001) "98% of kids would recommend the program to other children" (as cited in Dorian, 2012, p. 1).

Parent/child relationships. In addition to many behavioural improvements, changes in the parent/child relationship are often seen. In a longitudinal study of 240 divorced families, mother and child relationships were found to improve after participating in either a program for mothers only or a program for mothers and children. The positive effects on mother-child relationship were seen at post-test, at 6 months after the study, and 6 years after the end of the program through a questionnaire. The intervention itself was found to be the reason behind the improvement in relationship (Vélez, Wolchik, Tein, & Sandler, 2011).

In a qualitative study by Hans and Fine (2001) children reported that after their parents attended a parental education class, they still felt unheard and uninformed despite those being two areas the class focused on. A common theme was found where the children interviewed stated they felt hurt their parents did not inform them of the decision to divorce early enough in the process, as the children only found out about the divorce

on the day one parent moved out. This points to the fact that parental education classes may not be addressing communication in ways that parents can implement, and thus the families are not seeing as much benefit from taking a parental education class on divorce.

While communication is an area that could use improvement in parental education classes on the topic of divorce, one favourable outcome for children is that they report growing closer to at least one parent after the divorce due to more one-on-one quality time spent together (Hans & Fine, 2001). With more time to bond with a parent that the child may not have spent time with in the past, the parent/child relationship can flourish. Angarne-Lindberg et al. (2009) found that when children of divorce reflect on their past experiences, they wanted to be close with one or both of their parents during the divorce. In Fackrell et al. (2011), the meta-analysis found those who participated in divorce education to be 60% better off than those who did not participate in terms of the parent child relationship. Besides the Fackrell et al. study, Malcore et al. (2010) also found that psychoeducational groups were beneficial for parents divorcing with over 80% of parents in the study stating positive changes in the relationships with their children.

Theories of Child Development

"Development is the pattern of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes that begins at conception and continues through the lifespan" (Santrock, Woloshyn, Gallagher, Di Petta, & Marini, 2010, p. 30). In this final project, the focus will be on the following three developmental theories: Erikson's psychosocial theory, Piaget's cognitive development theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. This literature review will only focus on the development of children ages six to twelve as that is the age group the project targets. By understanding each child's individual experience, parents can further

understand how to aid their children in their journey through dealing with divorce and parents can better incorporate helping strategies into their lives that are developmentally appropriate.

Erikson's psychosocial theory. In Erikson's psychosocial theory, there are eight stages that humans move through as they grow and develop. Children ages six to eleven are at the Industry vs. Inferiority Stage (Pedro-Carroll, 2010) Important things during this stage are making friends and attending school, as via encouragement, children become confident in their abilities (Ginsburg, 1992). Children are focused on learning at this time, therefore it is important they feel competent to combat feelings of inferiority (Santrock et al., 2010).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development. According to Piaget, children use schemas, accommodation, and assimilation to make sense of and adjust to their world. As children grow and develop they move through four stages: sensorimotor, preperational, operational, and formal operational. Children ages six to eleven fall into the preoperational and concrete operational stages. During the preoperational stage, ages two to seven, children are learning to use language through pretend play and drawing. They turn their representation of the world into words and images that become increasingly precise. At this stage children are also egocentric, meaning they cannot tell that someone else has a different perspective from their own thoughts and feelings. Then, in the concrete operational stage, ages seven to eleven, logical thought is starting. (Santrock et al., 2010). Objects can now be classified into different groups and information can be combined and analyzed to reach conclusions (Kuhn, 1979).

Vygotsky's theory of child development. In Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, children learn through cultural interaction and their experiences. There are no stages, children develop based on their social interactions (Smidt, 2009) as there is no way to separate development from culture or social learning (Santrock et al., 2010). The major tenet of Vygotsky's theory is the zone of proximal development, "the range of tasks that are too difficult for children to master alone but that can be learned with guidance and assistance from adults or more-skilled children" (Santrock et al., 2010, p.46). This reinforces the emphasis on learning in Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development. As children learn, they integrate the information given into their existing cognitive structures with the end goal being to complete the task alone.

Children's Developmental Stages by Age

In addition to theories of child development, there are also developmental milestones that children reach as they mature. Child development is the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive changes that occur from birth to adolescence. In this section, the emphasis is on working with and understanding children ages six to twelve, or elementary school aged children. Children in this age range fall into two categories: 6-8 or ages 9-12. In middle to late childhood this means the main achievements are academic achievement, self-control, and extended social interactions. Early school-age children explore the world outside of their family; this includes adults such as teachers. This age group feels divorce is their fault as thinking is concrete and consists of rules. Children six to eight cling to the fantasy that their parents will get back together. They may also express strong feelings such as anger with parents. Children aged 9 to 10 are experiencing more freedom and more interest in friends. This time period is the beginning of logical

thought and when children start to notice the differences between themselves and other children their age. Children may worry and tend to take sides in a divorce, as well as attempt to soothe parents if they perceive them as being upset (Family Justice Services, 2011).

It is important to keep in mind that no two children are exactly the same. Some children will reach stages earlier or later than others (Family Justice Services, 2011). Each child will react to the divorce differently due to development and temperament (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Having an understanding of the developmental stages will help parents as well as educators and counsellors tailor interventions to children in each developmental stage.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is based on the principal that people need to be close physically, intellectually, and emotionally to each other in order to nurture and develop into healthy adults (Neufeld & Mate, 2004). Relationships are the basis for forming attachments and being able to develop into healthy adults. As humans, our first attachment begins at birth with infants relying on their parents for all basic needs. The bond between child and caregiver is the building block for forming future attachments, as it provides a schema with which to understand the world (Ainsworth, 1989); therefore, being conscious of healthy attachment can aid in healthy child development. Early attachment also influences future romantic relationships and friendships (Bowlby, 1969). It is advantageous and feasible for a child to form multiple attachments with friends, family, teachers, and other significant figures in his or her life, as these people become the child's support system.

Attachment is categorized as secure (healthy attachment) or insecure and then insecure can be divided into avoidant or anxious/ambivalent. A secure attachment is characterized by an attachment figure that is present, accessible, responsive, and displays unconditional love. With a secure attachment, the child will display confidence in exploring and learning as the attachment figure provides security and support if necessary. In an insecure attachment, children may not have had some of their needs met and so do not have as much confidence when facing new situations or challenges (Bowlby, 1969).

Healthy attachment for children is created through displaying love and security. Parents influence attachment through showing warmth, responsiveness, listening, and acting consistently with the child. This can be demonstrated through things such as remembering what matters to the child and asking them questions about it or sharing that information with the other caregivers in the child's life. As well, it is important to verbally tell the children they are loved on a regular basis and highlight their strengths so that they can feel positively about themselves (Family Justice Services, 2011). Often time in child development theories the focus can be on what to do when things go wrong instead of having the focus on showing parents how to parent when things are going well (Neuman, 1998). Thus, helping parents to strengthen and maintain positive attachment with their children will be the focus of this psychoeducational workshop.

Ainsworth's attachment theory also helps in the understanding of child development with respect to separation and divorce. With divorce, the child's family life changes with one parent leaving the home, creating loss. As a result, the child notices that one parent is not always present in his or her life and may apply this schema to the other

parent and worry that he or she will leave as well (Rogers, 2004); this can then lead to an insecure attachment. If a child displays strong attachment to their parent, they will have an easier time maintaining that connection when physically separate from one parent (Neufeld & Mate, 2004).

In attachment theory, people have different attachment styles due to different personal experiences in relationships (Bowlby, 1969). According to Fraley and Heffernan (2013) parental divorce is strongly connected to insecure attachment with parents in adulthood, meaning that parental divorce can negatively impact the parent-child relationship. Insecure attachment may be more common if parents divorce in their child's early years, rather than when the child is older. Conversely, fewer relationship difficulties will be present the stronger the pre-divorce relationship with parents (Amato, 2010). In addition, it is important to remember that lasting effects are not the norm, negative outcomes can be avoided when the child is able to spend time with both parents, the parent-child relationship is strong, and both parents are committed to parenting (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005). This pinpoints an area to focus on in terms of resiliency factors for children of divorce.

Another notable finding from the Fraley and Heffernan (2013) study is that post-divorce, children were more likely to have insecure attachment with their fathers rather than mothers. The authors attribute this to the amount of time spent with each parent, as most of the participants lived with their mothers and thus spent more time with their mothers. Thus, custody arrangements appear to have a large impact on attachment bonds between parent and child. This is a key finding to help mitigate possible effects of

divorce with something as simple as spending more time together improving parent-child relationships and consequently resiliency.

Neufeld and Mate's Attachment Principles

In order to better understand attachment and your child's behaviour, it is important to understand ways attachment is created (Neufeld & Mate, 2004, pp. 20-24). Attachment is formed via the following six ways: (1) *Physical proximity* is one way to create attachment; it is essentially connecting with an attachment figure through the physical senses of sight, taste, touch, and smell. This need never goes away; therefore, it becomes important during parental divorce to maintain contact via phone, Skype, and regular visits between parents and children in order to foster this most basic level of attachment. (2) *Sameness*, this where the child wants to model and be like the attachment figures in his or her life. This can be demonstrated through wanting to talk like an older sister or using the same phrases as a parent. The level of dependence on the attachment figure appears to affect the level of identification experienced. Essentially striving to be similar to those the child is closest to. (3) *Belonging and loyalty***:** In this form of attachment, children choose figures that are important to them; for example, stating this is my sister, my mom, my puppy; then begins an allegiance to the chosen attachment figures. The child will defend and keep the attachment figure's secrets. (4) *Significance.* In this case, attachment is based on feeling important and belonging. Children need their parents to fill this need so that they do not look to other places to feel as though they belong. Parents are usually a safer place to feel that unconditional love associated with belonging as opposed to peer groups, who may be less sensitive to the child's needs. Significance can be shown through including children in family activities, traditions, and

giving younger children special tasks. It can even be as simple as through a hug and saying "I love you". (5) *Feeling.* Besides proximity, sameness, loyalty, and significance, the fifth way to build attachment is through warm, loving feelings. Emotion is a large part of the attachment bond. This emotional intimacy allows the child to be able to live with physical separation from the parent, yet still be connected to the parent. Fostering loving feelings with children of divorce is an essential way to maintain that attachment bond and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Emotional intimacy is the most complex form of attachment, but arguably the most important as it teaches children to be vulnerable and trust. (6) *Being Known.* The final way of attaching can be seen in the school years. In order to connect with someone you need to be close to them and feel known by them. The act of feeling understood by an attachment figure includes things such as sharing secrets and exposing their most private self. A parent-attached child does not want to have secrets from the parents as that weakens their bond. The ability to have someone know your secrets and accept you as you are is the ultimate closeness.

Ways to Strengthen Attachment

As the initial caregiver bond between parent and child is so important, it is essential to remember that the parent is the child's main resource through the divorce. Good parenting requires time, energy, and emotion (Neuman, 1998). Some of the ways suggested to improve attachment are as simple as getting the attention of the child through a smile, affection, play, or caregiving. By providing emotional warmth and enjoyment attachment can be effectively activated. This may be through playing a game together, a hug, or words of encouragement. Another important aspect is creating

structure and routine in the child's life. This can be things such as a bedtime routine or Christmas traditions (Neufeld & Mate, 2004).

According to Neufeld and Mate (2004) in the situation of divorce, it is important to have reminders of the other parent when each parent is not with the child. This will help maintain the attachment as the child is thinking about the parent and connecting with them even when they are not present. Research shows that the amount of time spent with each parent greatly influences the attachment relationship that a child has with their parent (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013); making the relationship between parent and child the most important aspect of parenting for successful attachment.

In order to connect with children, Neufeld and Mate (2004) advocate getting in the child's space. This means making eye contact, smiling, and nodding. This conveys nurturing to the child as opposed to the usual way that parents get in their child's face; discipline. Getting in their space is one of the basic building blocks of connecting with a child. It can be as easy as smiling at the child while making dinner together. After parents and child have been apart for any length of time it is important to reinforce that connection through collecting rituals. Collecting rituals are useful in the morning, after school, and after watching T.V. It is a way to greet the child after being apart, show them someone cares. Collecting is especially important after an argument, as it is a way to repair the relationship and show the child love acceptance even when the child has disappointed the parent.

Another challenge of divorce is spending time away from children during the other parent's visitation. In this case it is important to remember to give the child something to use as a way to connect with the parent while they are apart. This can be

things such as physical touch, hugs, kisses, cuddles, or verbal statements of love. A child's self-esteem depends on being loved, accepted, and appreciated exactly as they are. It is essential for the child to know he or she is loved them unconditionally; this is the greatest gift!

Ways to Engage with your Child

Parents often wonder about how and when they should talk with their children. Some of the best talks occur while parents and children are doing other things. This may be taking a bath, swimming, driving somewhere, shopping. Do not worry about waiting for a special moment to have talks with children, lives are busy and the perfect moment may never come. Make sure the child has the adult's full attention when discussing important topics. This is especially true when first bringing up the divorce (Neuman, 1998).

Communication strategies. When communicating with your child about the divorce or separation, it is important to use clear language, show you understand their point of view, talk about how changes due to the divorce will affect your child and answer their questions openly and honestly (Neuman, 1998). Children communicate mostly in nonverbal ways. With this in mind, it is necessary as the parent to pay attention to the child's nonverbal behaviour (Neuman, 1998). This includes things such as touch, voice tone, eye contact, open and inviting posture, and facial expression (Young, 2013). While talking about the divorce make sure to send out nonverbal cues showing relaxation and openness to what the child may have to say.

After your child has shown courage and opened up, it is important for the parent to show they understood the verbal and nonverbal messages the child has shared. One

way to achieve this is through paraphrasing things the child has said. Paraphrasing is reflecting back story content, thoughts, and emotions in different words and in a non-judgemental way. It is a way to show empathy, understanding of the child's experience, and to confirm understanding of what the child is communicating. Once you have reached this understanding, then paraphrasing can open up a new line of communication and further a difficult discussion (Young, 2013).

Another method to encourage greater communication is through open questions. Open questions require more than a yes or no answer, as they encourage more information to be shared on a topic (Young, 2013). Questioning can be very effective if space and silence are left for the child to show how they are feeling and what they are thinking. Asking too many questions distracts the parent from listening and can make the child feel like they are being interrogated. When used sparingly, they can open up a conversation (Sternberg et al., 1997).

As an adult it is important to be cautious of leading questions, as they are too often used with teens and kids. Leading questions are usually more about the parent's agenda, as they already have the answer the parent is looking for placed in the question. These types of questions shut down kids and do not allow them to say what is actually going on for them (Sternberg et al., 1997; Young, 2013).

Love and acceptance. In addition to open communication, children need to be told they are loved often (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Never assume that the child knows this, he or she cannot read minds Feeling loved becomes the basis of the parent-child relationship. By appreciating the child's strengths, the attachment relationship becomes solidified as the parents show their love through physical and verbal manifestations.

Quality and quantity time. Spending time with school aged children is an essential part of engaging with children. In particular, psychoeducational interventions can provide non-custodial parents with practical knowledge of how to create quality time with their children, as well as stress the importance of encouraging ex-spouses to spend time with the children post-divorce, as the child needs contact with both parents (Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2005).Children need to know they are important enough that you want to spend time with them. It can be in small chunks throughout the day. In fact, this helps with the second apart about quantity time, as children also need to have multiple interactions with their parents each day. One-on-one time is important to strengthen the individual parent/child relationship. This gives opportunities for true communication as there are no other people present. This one-on-one time does not need to involve any special gifts or treats (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). It can be as simple as talking while washing the dishes, driving, or colouring.

Structure equals safety. Routines will help children settle into a new home or school (Neuman, 1998). When children know what is expected of them, it gives them a sense of control over their behaviour. Maintain bedtimes and mealtimes in particular. This will help reduce stress and provide opportunities to discuss highs and lows. It also will foster the feeling of belonging in the changing family environment (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Take the time to set up their room to the child's liking in a new house. Make sure they have their favourite things to take with them between houses if that is the case. (Neuman, 1998). It is so important to find those times of closeness through rituals and family traditions (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). A family game night every week lets the children know that they will have that consistent time with their parent. Another ritual might be

reading a book every night before bed or making decorations for the Christmas tree together. It does not matter what the ritual is, just that the child knows they are part of the family and have structure to count on through the difficult times.

Understanding thoughts and emotions. Children have thoughts and feelings just as adults do; it is the parents' responsibility to recognize this fact and learn how to help their children communicate their opinions. The main difference between kids and adults is that kids may not have the words to articulate how they are feeling and what they are thinking. This may be due to their developmental stage or because they have no experience to draw from. Children of divorce may keep their feelings inside as a coping mechanism to protect them from the hurt they may experience from expressing their views. They also do not want add to the difficult situation when their parents already have so much to deal with (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Because children are so prone to holding their feelings in, many will not even tell their friends at school (Pedro-Carroll, 2010) Talking about the divorce may make them feel embarrassed of their family. This is why it is important to encourage discussion of feelings as a routine part of life so children can see their parents modelling how to deal with the strange and strong emotions they may be feeling. It is essential children know that feelings are not good or bad, they just are a part of life. Angarne-Lindberg et al. (2009) found that adult children of divorce were disappointed in their parents ability to discuss divorce and the emotions associated.

While children express themselves, they do so in ways different from adults. Children have difficulty expressing their emotions through words alone; instead, they may use playing, drawing, writing, building, and other creative methods (Neuman, 1998).

When children are able to express themselves their words can be taken in a very literal way. It is important to look for the larger significance of the statement in the child's life, versus the actual words used. Often times when children speak, they are looking for reassurance on the themes of love and security: that their parents still love them unconditionally and will still be there to take care of them. By being able to listen for the deeper meaning, children feel understood and this in turn strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child(Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Through improved emotional communication, parents can strengthen the parent-child relationship during divorce and help their child flourish.

According to Pedro-Carroll (2010) some of the common concerns expressed by children are as follows (p. 20):

- Missing the other parent (98%)
- Worrying about what is going to happen in the future (94%)
- Parents arguing about the kids (92%)
- Parents fighting often (86%)
- It is my fault (79%)
- Moving between multiple homes (78%)
- School is challenging (72%)
- Not having enough time with dad (72%) or mom (64%)
- Anxiety about what other children will think about their divorced parents (65%)
- Being concerned about the family as a whole (65%)
- Concerns about money (56%)

These concerns are areas to highlight in discussions with children experiencing divorce.

Resiliency Factors

In this section resiliency factors will be looked at as ways to reduce the possibility of the risk factors associated with children experiencing divorce. Some protective factors include parenting skills, positive parent-child interactions, positive attachment, feeling secure, problem solving skills, self-esteem, feelings in control, exercise, autonomy, and social support (Stallman & Sanders, 2007).

The main source of resiliency will always be quality parenting seen through simple, everyday interactions between parents and children. If parenting were compared to building a house, this would be the foundation. These are things such as communication, active-listening, having empathy, and creating clear expectations for behaviour. Then the frame on which the rest of the relationship can be built is through words and physical affection. With love and acceptance, the child can become anything. Kids will see benefits even if only one parent is able to provide a strong parent and child relationship (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

External resources have the potential to promote resiliency in children experiencing divorce and separation. Parents should encourage their children to reach out for help when they need it. A simple way to show kids how to ask for help is to model the behaviour. Having external support from trusted individuals in the child's life gives the child people to talk to about what is going on in the family. These extra support people can help children feel less alone. Examples include: family, school, support groups, or activities to name a few (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). Friends and grandparents often became sources of support for children during a divorce as parents can be preoccupied with their own worries (Butler et al., 2002). School can be an unused, but effective resource as it is

a large part of children's lives. Inform teachers and counsellors at the school about what is going on at home. This helps staff better support families experiencing divorce. Support groups, as mentioned earlier, are a great way to connect with other children going through divorce, as well as give them a safe space to express emotions. With extra-curricular activities, these are places where the focus can be on the positive. By highlighting children's strengths, they can begin to build confidence and special talents. Activities may also be a great way to build friendships which are developmentally important to school age children. It has been found that parents and children doing activities together can benefit children going through divorce in the areas of self-confidence, family perception, decreasing feelings of loneliness, as well as reducing negative feelings associated with the divorce. Social connectedness in terms of children's well-being is very important during divorce. It is important not to withdraw, but to maintain the support system (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Other forms of resilience can come via emotional intelligence skills. Building on the section *understanding emotions,* by being aware of emotions, parents can help their child identify and express emotions in a healthy way. This self-awareness then teaches emotion regulation which will help the child manage strong emotions (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

One way to achieve emotional intelligence skills is through authoritative parenting. Authoritative parents are warm and nurturing, set effective limits for their children, and protect their children from conflict between parents. Authoritative parenting is associated with academic success, less emotional difficulty, the ability to manage behaviour, and long-term success in the lives of children (Pedro-Carroll, 2010).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the literature review provided the background and theoretical basis for the workshop on engaging with children of divorce. With divorce so prevalent at this time, parental education programs in usage now are designed to change parenting after and during divorce to improve child well-being (Sigal et al., 2011). The greatest threat for long-term negative outcomes associated with divorce is problems in the parent-child relationship (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). The parent-child relationship should be a priority no matter what is going on in the family (Neufeld & Mate, 2004); hence, it is important to take the time to tell children they are loved and to spend quality time with children (Pedro-Carroll, 2010). The following chapters will provide more details on the workshop methodology.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the methodology chapter, the methods used to research the effects of divorce, divorce interventions, child development theories, and attachment theory are presented. The literature review formed the base of the parental education workshop created for this project (Appendix A) and is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this project. Various databases accessed and search terms used are outlined in the research process. Then ethical considerations and editorial standards will be considered.

Research Process

An extensive literature review was done on the broad topic of divorce to provide a secure theoretical basis to root the project. The data bases PsycInfo, Academic Search Complete, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were searched for relevant journal articles. Keywords such as but not limited to: *divorce, separation, divorce intervention, parental divorce, divorce education, children of divorced parents, adult children of divorce, well-being, mental health, attachment, and parental education programs* were used. The material accessed from the above databases was acquired from journal articles, books, government reference material, and other gray material available in print and online. The information used in this final project ranged from the 1990's to the present date in order to encompass an overview of the important information available on divorce and interventions to assist families through the divorce process. The Parenting After Separation (PAS) (Family Justice Services, 2011) course used in Alberta provided a starting point for the workshop, as this workshop was designed to complement PAS information with the main focus on connecting and maintaining the attachment bond

between parent and child, as well as how to communicate with your child about divorce. See Appendix A for a brief summary of the PAS course.

Workshop

The workshop is designed to be delivered by a therapist with a master's degree in a counselling related field (psychology or social work) and experience working with school aged children and their families. The workshop is in the form of a PowerPoint presentation complete with hands-on activities. It is designed to be delivered over two evenings with each session lasting three hours for a total of six hours, with breaks provided during each session. In between the two sessions, a hands-on homework assignment will be given. The homework assignment is designed to be completed in under a half hour. It is recommended that child care be provided to help eliminate barriers for parents to attend.

The workshop will provide parents with developmental information and attachment information for children aged six to eleven. In the classes, the focus will be applying the information learned to real life scenarios for the parents to be able to use at home. A homework assignment will be given to reinforce learning, as well as to have the parents put the tools learned into practice between training days.

Ethical Considerations

Since this project does not gather quantitative or qualitative data from research participants, approval from the Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge was not needed. While no human subjects approval was needed for the completion of the project, I created this project with respect for the dignity of all person's using or taking the course. The ethical standards outlined in the *Canadian Code of Ethics*

for Psychologists (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001) have been taken into consideration with the creation of this parental education workshop.

Editorial Standards

This project maintains the editorial standards outlined in the *American Psychological Association Publication Manual 6th Edition* (American Psychological Association, 2010). In the appendices, which contain the PowerPoint workshop and associated materials, some stylistic and creative liberties were taken in order to present the material in an appealing and easy to understand format. This involved the use of different fonts, colours, and formatting at times. In addition, pictures were used and cited from Microsoft Office Clip Board as these images can be used in educational materials and are copyright free.

Benefits and Impacts Associated with the Final Project

This final project contains resources to help parents connect with their children and positively impact the parent-child relationship to promote resiliency during the divorce process (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). This workshop will also be a useful tool for therapists to use in session with individuals and families to strengthen the attachment bond between parent and child in divorcing families. The materials in this final project can be shared with other counsellors and parental divorce support groups in Alberta as ways to provide up to date interventions. While other psychoeducational programs cover many topics in a short time frame, this workshop is designed to concentrate on the parent-child relationship as it is one of the main predictors of success post-divorce (Clark, 2013; Fackrell et al., 2011). As well, this workshop is able to meet the need for hands-on and practical knowledge in parental education programs (Bowers et al., 2011).

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 3, the research process for the literature used in this final project was outlined. Many sources from primary, secondary, and gray literature on the topic of divorce, in addition to interventions to support divorcing families were compiled from search engines. The psychoeducational workshop for divorcing parents with elementary school aged children, delivered by an experienced facilitator will offer information through PowerPoint, hands-on activities, and discussion. This final project was created to fill the need for psychoeducational programs that address the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs of children experiencing divorce (Cartwright, 2006). In the workshop, the focus will be on using the empirical evidence to help parents achieve comfort in talking with their children on the topic of divorce, providing space for feelings, and above all maintaining the connection between parent and child throughout the divorce process. Throughout the following chapter, the focus will be on describing how the PowerPoint workshop is organized.

Chapter 4: PowerPoint Workshop Overview

Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the self-created workshop: **"***Engaging with your child: A workshop for parents experiencing divorce and separation*". For more information on the facilitation and completion of this workshop see appendix B titled "Facilitators guide to engaging with your child: A workshop for parents experiencing divorce and separation". For more detailed information on the content of the workshop consult "PowerPoint Slides" located in Appendix C.

Workshop Overview

The purpose of the workshop is to educate parents on how to foster the parent-child relationship using communication skills, rituals, and proximity. This project is designed to facilitate discussion and learning through over 70 slides and multiple handouts. There are also homework worksheets to promote use of tools in between session one and session two.

Rationale for Format

The workshop is intended to be delivered in three hour segments over two days with a period of one week separating the two sessions. Altogether, the workshop will be a total of six hours to account for icebreaker activities and discussion time to work with the material presented. A brief intervention was chosen as fewer than four hours of instruction has been shown to provide equivalent positive outcomes as longer divorce parental education courses (Fackrell et al., 2011). Using a short-term intervention is ideal as it will take less time out of parents' already busy schedules and use less financial resources.

In addition to the self-designed workshop being brief, it is also applied and delivered in person. The workshop format is designed to use an interactive and hands-on approach to aid in the learning process as participants are able to work with the new material and learn how to apply the new material. The class is face-to-face, as opposed to self-directed online learning, in order for the participants to be able to interact with other divorcing parents in similar situations and ask the facilitator questions to make sure they understand the workshop content and how to apply it (Bowers et al., 2011).

PowerPoint

This PowerPoint presentation was designed in adherence to APA (6th Ed) standards, but some stylistic and creative choices were made to help make the material engaging and the format easy to learn from. Differences from APA standards include variations in fonts, colours, and formatting. The presentation component centres around building the parent/child relationship and is divided into two parts, Session I and Session II. Session I includes an icebreaker and discussion of the class structure to foster group cohesion and safety. Following the opening activities, communication strategies involving paraphrasing, open questions, and emotions are presented to help parents with ways to talk about divorce with their children. The first class ends with the discussion of the first homework assignment, to be completed between session I and II. Session II begins with debriefing of the homework activity and then progresses into additional attachment strategies such as how to create proximity, support, and structure in the new family unit post-separation. Session II concludes with the final homework assignment, relationship BINGO, and the workshop evaluation. Together these two 3-hour sessions provide the theoretical and practical basis for improving the parent child relationship in

order to promote resiliency. For more information on the content of each section please see Appendix C entitled “PowerPoint Slides”.

Accompanying Materials

While the PowerPoint presentation is a major portion of the final project, the additional appendices are also important. Information for the facilitator includes the purpose for the workshop sessions, recommendations and facilitator qualifications, target population, resources, workshop outline, and copyright information for “Facilitators guide to engaging with your child: A workshop for parents experiencing divorce and separation”, can be located in Appendix B**.** The majority of the hands-on activities are located in Appendix D titled “Worksheets and Handouts”. These include (i) Reflection Activity, (ii) Using Feeling Words, (iii) List of emotions, (iv) How are you Feeling?, (v) Paraphrasing and Open Question Practice, (vi) Homework #1, (vii) Brainstorming Rituals and Routines, (viii) Creating Proximity When Apart, ix) Homework #2 Relationship BINGO, and(x) Resource List . These resources have been designed to accompany the PowerPoint slides and promote learning in a practical manner. The final portion of the workshop is the evaluation, which is designed to help the facilitator improve future workshops (Appendix D). Each workshop participant will receive a copy of the PowerPoint slides, as well as worksheets and handouts at the beginning of class one. These are foundational materials that participants can use for notes as well as refer to when implementing the practical applications and concepts at home.

Chapter Summary

In the fourth chapter, the structure of the workshop: “Engaging with your child: A workshop for parents experiencing divorce and separation” is outlined as a 70 plus slide

PowerPoint presentation with accompanying activity handouts and two homework assignments. These workshop materials are located in the appendices B through D at the end of this final project. In the final chapter I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this final project and suggest areas for future research development.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Following the workshop overview in chapter four, this final chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of "Engaging with your child: A workshop for parents experiencing divorce and separation". The final section presents areas and topics where future research is needed as supported in the literature.

To summarize, this final project was designed as free, short-term intervention using an applied and hands-on approach to mitigating any potentially occurring negative outcomes associated with divorce and separation. The PowerPoint workshop is split into two parts i) communication strategies including paraphrasing, open questions, and emotions and ii) ways to foster the parent/child relationship using attachment principles, support, and structure. Another major component of the workshop are the homework assignments to be completed in-between session one and session two to reinforce the concepts learned in the workshop. As a whole, the purpose of this final project is to provide parents with information on how to develop and foster the parent/child connection throughout the divorce process.

Strengths

The strengths of this newly created project are plentiful. The first major strength is that the project was thoroughly researched using primary and secondary literature from both the past and present, enabling the creation of a project built on historical findings of the consequences of divorce combined with newer research on interventions to aid children and families experiencing divorce. In addition, the use of research from the 1980s to present allows the project to be firmly rooted in theory. Together the use of past and current research takes into account historical discoveries around the effects of

divorce and allowed comparison to the present. The PowerPoint workshop is based off of resources that are currently being used to aid divorcing families in a combined and focused format. This project is designed to fill the gap in interventions available to families; specifically in the area of maintaining the connection with their child to mitigate many of the damaging effects of divorce (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013).

Another strength of this project is the focus on helping parents connect with their children. Many parenting after separation courses focus more on co-parenting and navigating the legal system, for example the PAS course offered in Alberta. Instead, this workshop focuses specifically on educating parents on creating a strong parent-child relationship so that children are less likely to have lasting effects from the divorce. By creating a stable, affectionate, and understanding parent-child relationship, resiliency in the children is enhanced (Stallman & Sanders, 2007).

Finally, this psychoeducational workshop is based on recent divorce research in the areas of attachment and parent-child relationships. The use of current research strengthens the theoretical background of this presentation as well as keeps the workshop current. Through using program evaluations of divorce education programs, this workshop builds on the topics that have been identified as important and strengthens areas that have not been addressed. This is true especially in the areas of incorporating hands-on activities, discussion, and skills to improve the parent child interactions (Bowers et al., 2011). In addition, it focuses on the basis for creating strong relationships, as this is an invaluable skill to have as a parent as well as a general person. Using Neufeld's and Mate's (2004) concepts to increase attachment, this project can be extrapolated and applied to working with children slightly older or younger in terms of

dealing with other forms of transition or loss such as moving, birth of a sibling, death, etc. as long as the child's developmental needs are considered.

Limitations

While the above section outlines the projects strengths, the major limitation of this workshop is that the program has not undergone rigorous scientific testing for efficacy. The gold-standard in counselling is to use evidenced-based practice. This is an area to build on in the future, see future areas of research section below for more detail.

Another limitation for this workshop is that the program is brief, as it is designed to be delivered over two days for a total of six hours so that parents are able to fit the class into their already demanding schedules. Consequently, this short-term class limits the overall benefit participants may be able to glean from a longer program. For example, if the workshop was offered over a ten week period, the parents would be able to try out the tools provided at home with their children and then work through any potential difficulties with the group. The parents would be able to receive more support and feedback from the facilitator and the group members; thus, hopefully improving their communication skills and their parent/child relationship. Without more time to learn and apply the material, the benefits associated with the workshop may not be as robust.

Often overlooked when considering limitations of a workshop, is that experts in the field have not been consulted in the creation of this workshop. Without the input of an expert that works with divorcing families, the workshop is inherently weaker. There may be gaps in the information given that parents normally rely on and that the experts would share. In particular, there may be more time spent on less essential topics and decreased time spent on harder to grasp or more beneficial topics. Consulting with others allows

common themes to emerge and practical knowledge to be combined; thus, collaboration strengthens any project.

While a thorough literature review has been conducted, not every article on the topic has been included. Divorce is a vastly researched topic due to its prevalence and the scope of its effect on society. As a result, it would not be feasible to incorporate every article or book on the topic. The leaders in the field: Amato, Kelly, Cartwright, Pedro-Carroll have been included, as well as other important works historically and more recently to get depth and breadth.

Future Areas of Research

According to Fackrell et al. (2011) those who participated in divorcing parental education programs were 50% better off than those who did not participate. With this information it is clear that parental education programs are effective and need to continue to be developed. In particular, future research should concentrate on families with high-conflict divorces as education programs and interventions need to be tailored to this group's specific needs (Malcore et al., 2010). With more research to inform evidenced-based treatment, better outcomes for families experiencing enduring conflict can be achieved.

In the future, it would be beneficial to conduct a formal study on the efficacy of this parental education workshop. Through examining efficacy, it would highlight which topics and activities in the presentation helped parents and their children. This area of research would lead to program evaluation which is so desperately needed (Abel et al., 2013; Amato, 2000). Many parental education groups exist, but few have undergone rigorous testing (Arbuthnot et al., 1997; Fackrell et al., 2011; McKenry et al., 1999; Sigal

et al., 2011); as divorce education programs have been created faster than the research to support the programs (Becher et al., 2015).

A particular way to improve divorcing parental education programs would be to have court-based programs work together with researchers to create programs that follow evidenced-based protocols(Sigal et al., 2011). With the combined expertise, programs would be stronger and be more likely to reach the overall goal of improving child and family well-being.

Another area of future research would be gathering information from the children's perspective on what helped them get through the divorce. There is much research from the perspective of parents and teachers, but limited studies with information from the child's perspective (Abel et al., 2013; Beausang et al., 2012). By understanding each child's individual experience, this data can further inform the alteration or creation of future divorce support groups for children (Amato, 2000) and how to better help the children of divorce to decrease the negative effects associated with divorce (Cartwright, 2006). This type of study may reveal things that really aided the children in their journey through dealing with divorce, or things that may have been missing from the support they received from their parents, such as having someone to talk to who has been through a divorce (Hans & Fine, 2001). This type of study will fill the need for more qualitative research that gives children a voice and more qualitative research on specific interventions that mitigate the possible damaging effects of divorce.

Chapter Summary

The final project created has many strengths and limitations which can help to inform future research on the topic of parental education classes for divorcing families.

While this program provides tools to help parents bond with their children through divorce, research on program efficacy would strengthen this workshop as well as provide increased support for future funding and resources to be directed into program evaluation and creation.

Closing Remarks

I created this project to fill a need for resources for parents to maintain that connection with their children during divorce. Psychoeducational classes for parents divorcing are extremely beneficial for parents to maintain and cultivate attachment bonds between parents and children as they have been shown to improve parent child relationships (Fackrell et al., 2011; Malcore et al., 2010). There are court created resources available for parents, but these resources have a wider scope. This workshop is created to be a hands-on workshop for parents with more practical applications and ideas given to help parents maintain the ever important parent-child relationship.

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Appendix A

Parenting After Separation Screen Shot

http://pas.albertacourts.ab.ca/

Appendix B

Facilitator's Guide To Engaging With Your Child: A Workshop For Parents Experiencing Divorce And Separation

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FACILITATOR'S GUIDE TO ENGAGING WITH YOUR CHILD: A WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS EXPERIENCING DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to foster continued secure attachment between children and their caregivers as they have the most contact and thus can make the largest impact. Without this parent-child relationship, children will be more likely to suffer from the negative effects of divorce. This workshop will focus on helping parents achieve comfort in talking with their children on the topic of divorce, providing space for feelings, and above all maintaining the connection between parent and child through structure and proximity. While other psychoeducational programs cover a broad over-view of legal issues, parental conflict, as well as how divorce affects the family members, this workshop is designed to concentrate on the parent-child relationship as it is one of the main predictors of success post-divorce.

Recommendations and Facilitator Qualifications

It is recommended that facilitators familiarize themselves with Chapters 1 to 5 of this project as the information covered in these chapters is the basis for the topics covered in the workshop. As well, instructors should be familiar with this facilitator guide as well as the PowerPoint slides and associated handouts in order to be able to competently present the workshop. There are some guiding notes written in the notes section under some of the slides in the PowerPoint. Facilitators should be a therapist with a master's degree in a counselling related field (psychology or social work) with experiencing working with school aged children and their families.

Target Population

The target population for this workshop is parents who are separating or divorcing who have elementary school aged children roughly six to eleven years of age. This is so that the focus may be on the specific developmental features, needs, and support strategies for that particular age group.

Resources

Each participant is to receive a copy of:

- PowerPoint Slides
- Worksheets and Handouts
- Workshop Evaluation

Workshop Outline

- The workshop is delivered in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.
- It is designed to be delivered over two evenings with each session lasting three hours for a total of six hours, with breaks provided during each session.
- In between the two sessions, a hands-on homework assignment will be given.
- It is recommended that child care be provided to help eliminate barriers for parents to attend.

Topic/Activity	**Time**
Session 1	
Icebreaker, Welcome and Structure	30 min
Effects of divorce	30 min
Reflection Activity	20 min
Break	10-15min
Communication -Paraphrasing and open questions and activity	45min
-Emotions -activity	30min
Homework	10min
	Total time: 3 hours

*All times are rough estimates

Topic/Activity	Time
Session 2	
Discussion of Homework	25 min
Practical Strategies	15 min
Activity	20 min
Break	15min
Proximity	30min
Activity	20min
Extra-Curricular Activities	15min
Summary and Closing	10min
Homework	10min
Workshop Evaluation	15min
	Total Time: 3 hours

Copyright

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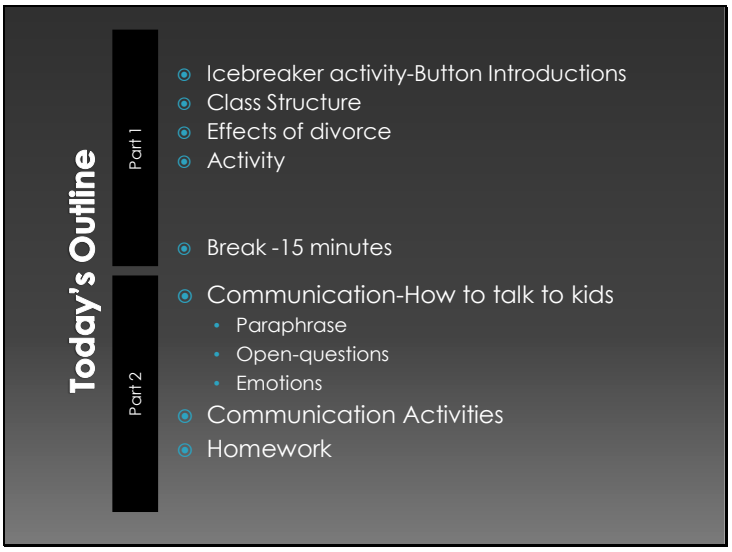
Appendix C

PowerPoint Slides

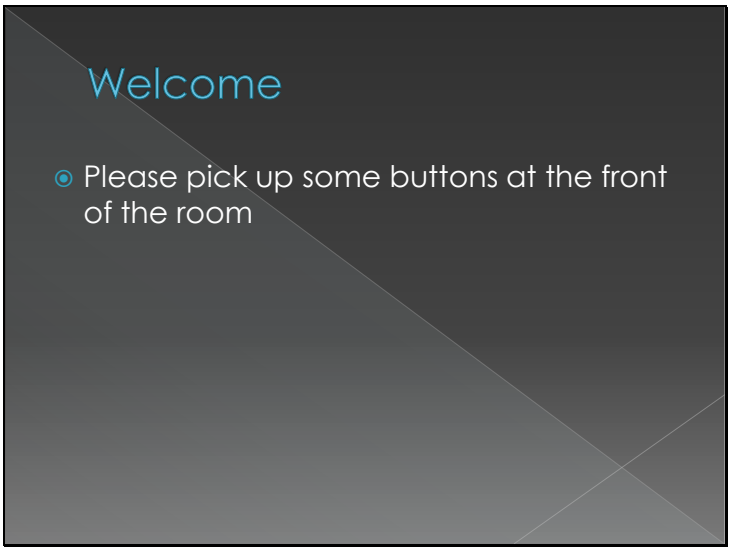
Slide 1

Engaging with your child
A workshop for parents experiencing
divorce and separation

Slide 2


Today's Outline
Part 1
Icebreaker activity-Button Introductions
Class Structure
Effects of divorce
Activity
Break -15 minutes
Part 2
Communication-How to talk to kids
Paraphrase
Open-questions
Emotions
Communication Activities
Homework

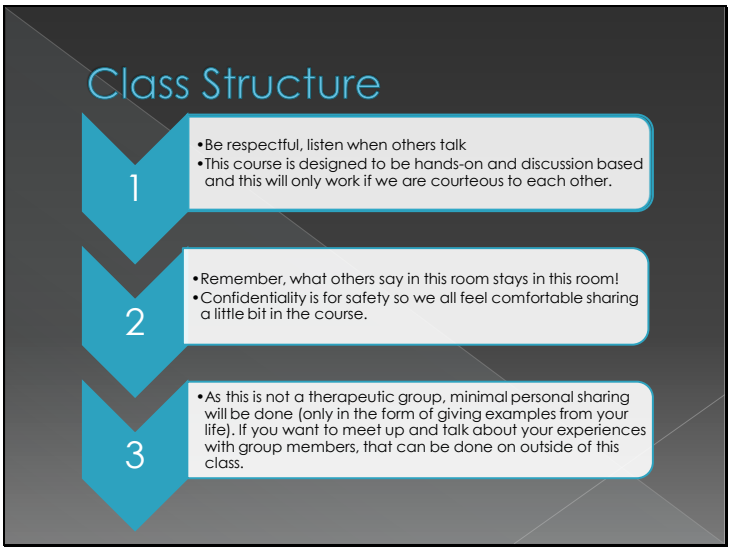
Slide 3



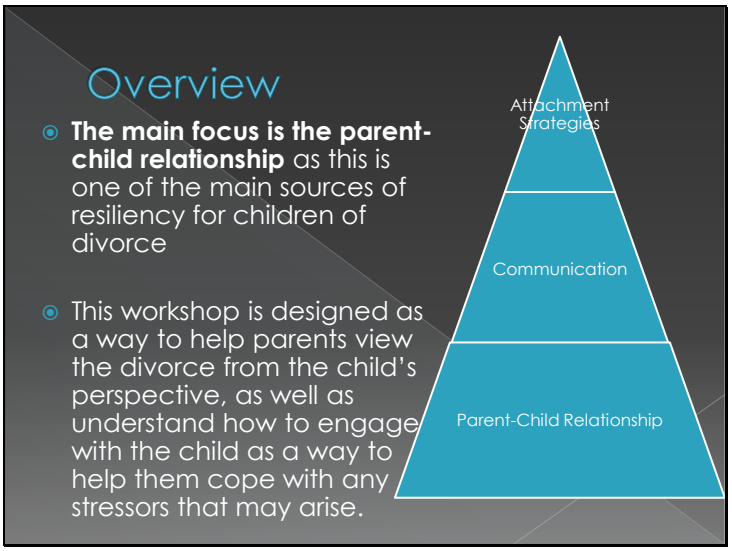
Slide 4

Icebreaker –for each button of each colour, tell the group something about the associated category
Red
Blue
Green
Black
Orange
Yellow
Brown
White
Pink
Purple
Favourite season
# of kids in your family
Favourite colour
Where you are from
Name of first pet
Foods you enjoy
Family traditions
Hobbies
Favourite winter activity
What you wanted to be when you grew-up

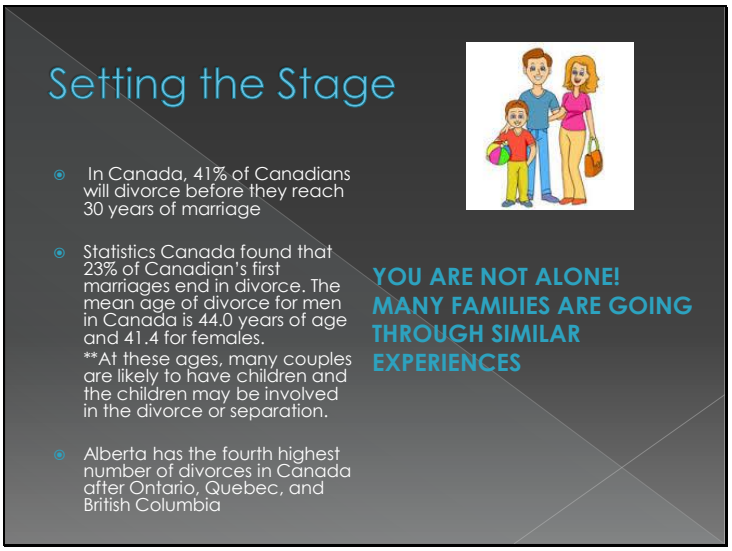
Slide 5


Class Structure
1
•Be respectful, listen when others talk
•This course is designed to be hands-on and discussion based and this will only work if we are courteous to each other.
2
•Remember, what others say in this room stays in this room!
•Confidentiality is for safety so we all feel comfortable sharing a little bit in the course.
3
•As this is not a therapeutic group, minimal personal sharing will be done (only in the form of giving examples from your life). If you want to meet up and talk about your experiences with group members, that can be done on outside of this class.

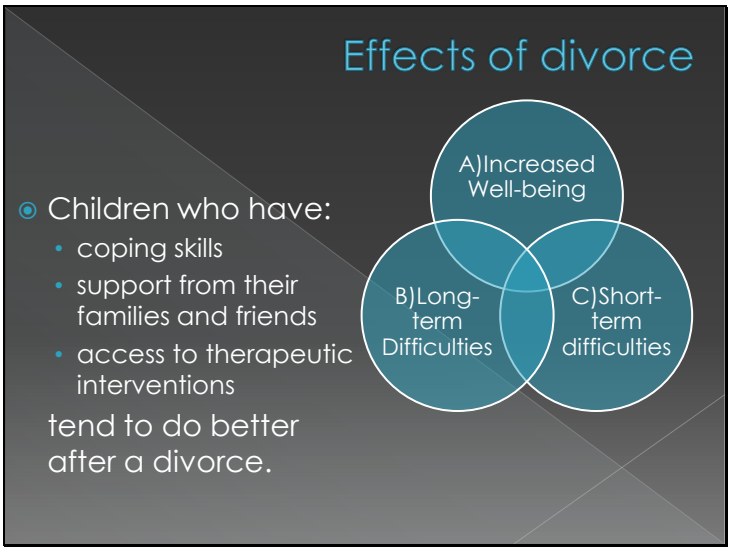
Slide 6


Overview
The main focus is the parent-child relationship as this is one of the main sources of resiliency for children of divorce
This workshop is designed as a way to help parents view the divorce from the child's perspective, as well as understand how to engage with the child as a way to help them cope with any stressors that may arise.
Attachment Strategies
Communication
Parent-Child Relationship

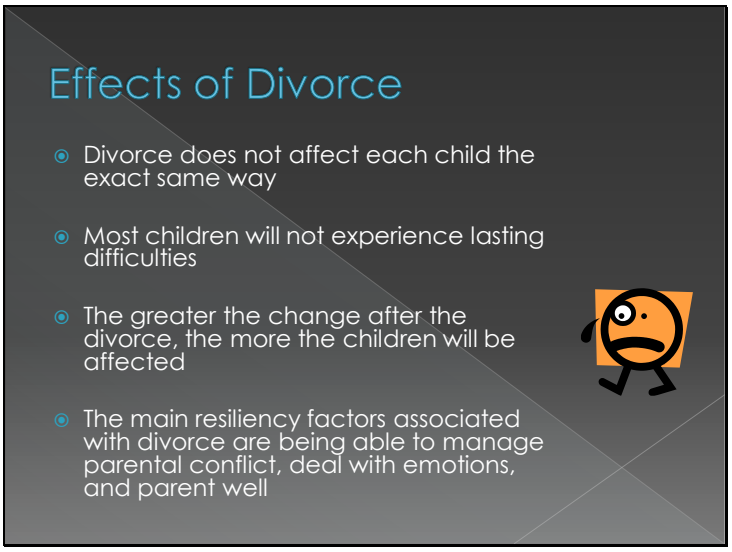
Slide 7


Setting the Stage
In Canada, 41% of Canadians will divorce before they reach 30 years of marriage
Statistics Canada found that 23% of Canadian's first marriages end in divorce. The mean age of divorce for men in Canada is 44.0 years of age and 41.4 for females.
**At these ages, many couples are likely to have children and the children may be involved in the divorce or separation.
Alberta has the fourth highest number of divorces in Canada after Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia
YOU ARE NOT ALONE! MANY FAMILIES ARE GOING THROUGH SIMILAR EXPERIENCES

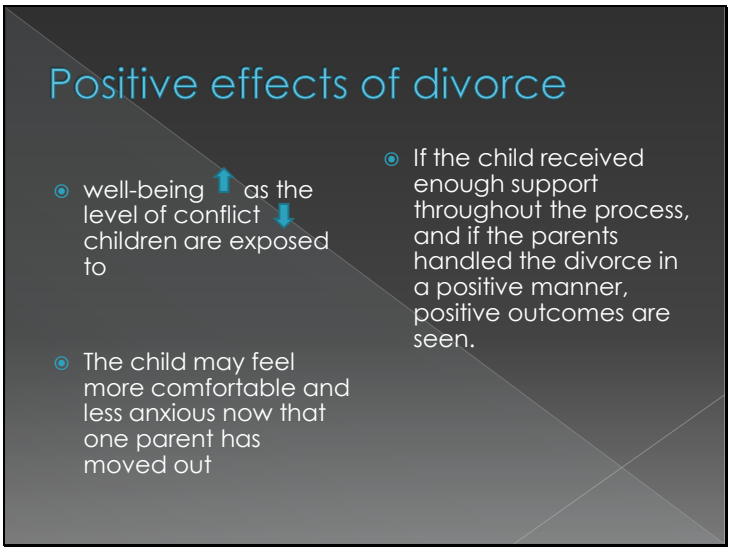
Slide 8


Effects of divorce
Children who have:
coping skills
support from their families and friends
access to therapeutic interventions
tend to do better after a divorce.
A)Increased Well-being
B)Long-term Difficulties
C)Short-term difficulties

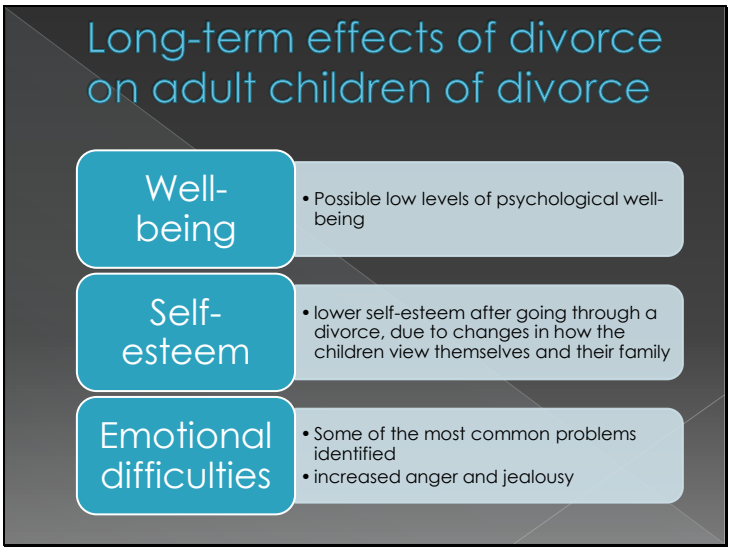
Slide 9


Effects of Divorce
Divorce does not affect each child the exact same way
Most children will not experience lasting difficulties
The greater the change after the divorce, the more the children will be affected
The main resiliency factors associated with divorce are being able to manage parental conflict, deal with emotions, and parent well

Slide 10

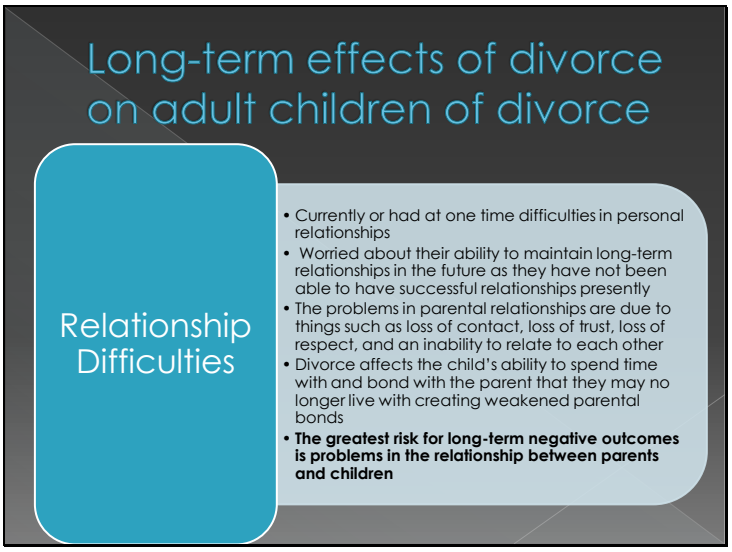

Positive effects of divorce
well-being ↑ as the level of conflict ↓ children are exposed to
The child may feel more comfortable and less anxious now that one parent has moved out
If the child received enough support throughout the process, and if the parents handled the divorce in a positive manner, positive outcomes are seen.

Slide 11

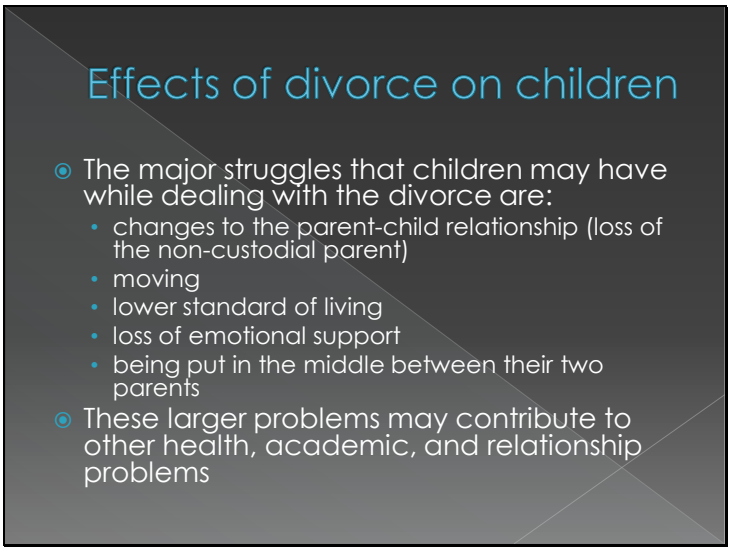


I want to be clear that divorce does not mean that your child will have lasting effects, but it is important to be aware of possible outcomes in order to figure out ways to promote resiliency in these areas.

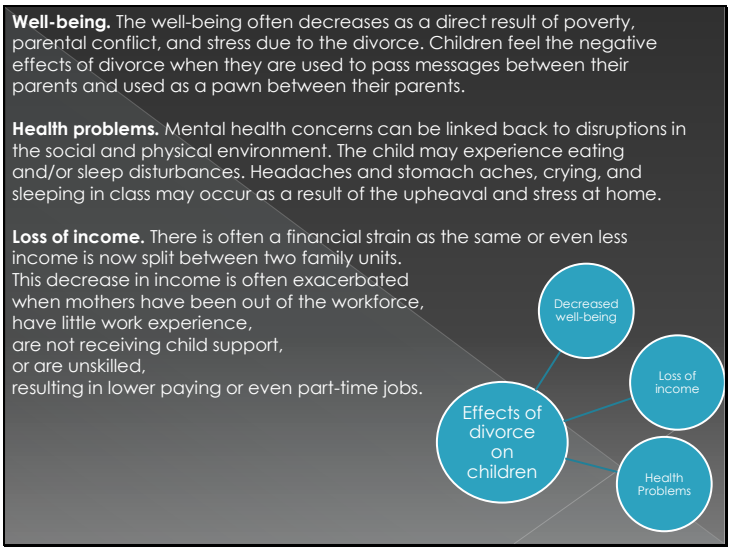
Slide 12


Long-term effects of divorce on adult children of divorce
Relationship Difficulties
• Currently or had at one time difficulties in personal relationships
• Worried about their ability to maintain long-term relationships in the future as they have not been able to have successful relationships presently
• The problems in parental relationships are due to things such as loss of contact, loss of trust, loss of respect, and an inability to relate to each other
• Divorce affects the child's ability to spend time with and bond with the parent that they may no longer live with creating weakened parental bonds
• The greatest risk for long-term negative outcomes is problems in the relationship between parents and children

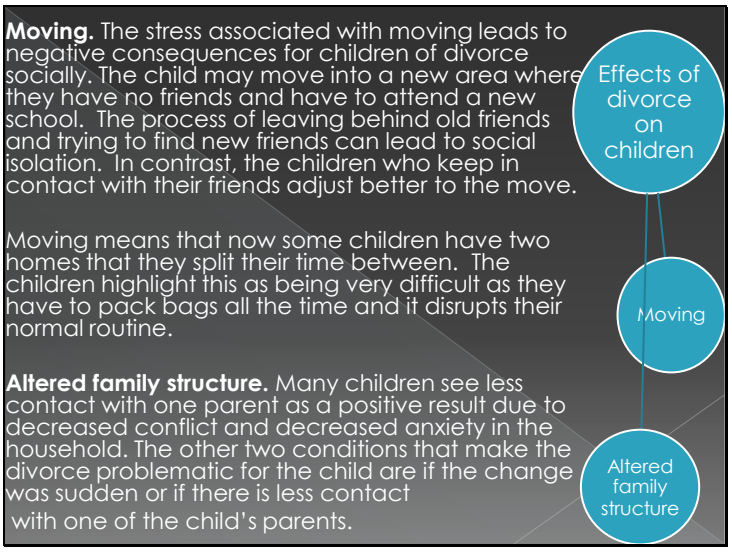
Slide 13


Effects of divorce on children
The major struggles that children may have while dealing with the divorce are:
changes to the parent-child relationship (loss of the non-custodial parent)
moving
lower standard of living
loss of emotional support
being put in the middle between their two parents
These larger problems may contribute to other health, academic, and relationship problems

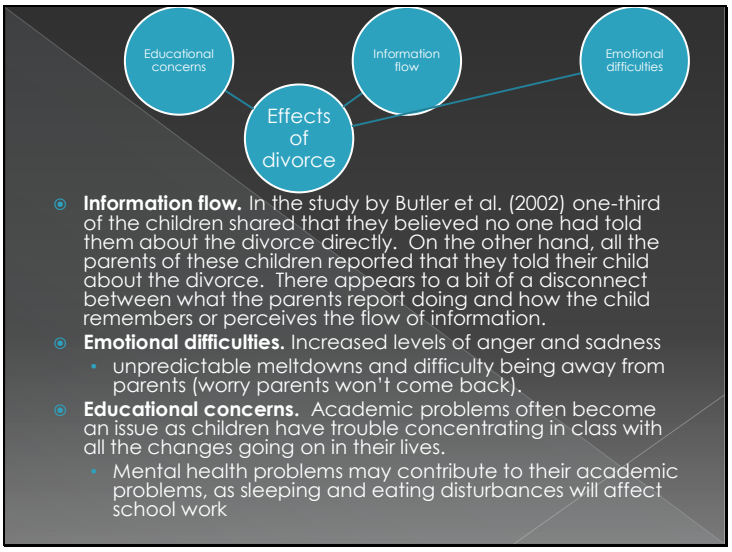
Slide 14


Well-being. The well-being often decreases as a direct result of poverty, parental conflict, and stress due to the divorce. Children feel the negative effects of divorce when they are used to pass messages between their parents and used as a pawn between their parents.
Health problems. Mental health concerns can be linked back to disruptions in the social and physical environment. The child may experience eating and/or sleep disturbances. Headaches and stomach aches, crying, and sleeping in class may occur as a result of the upheaval and stress at home.
Loss of income. There is often a financial strain as the same or even less income is now split between two family units.
This decrease in income is often exacerbated
when mothers have been out of the workforce,
have little work experience,
are not receiving child support,
or are unskilled,
resulting in lower paying or even part-time jobs.
Decreased well-being
Loss of income
Effects of divorce on children
Health Problems

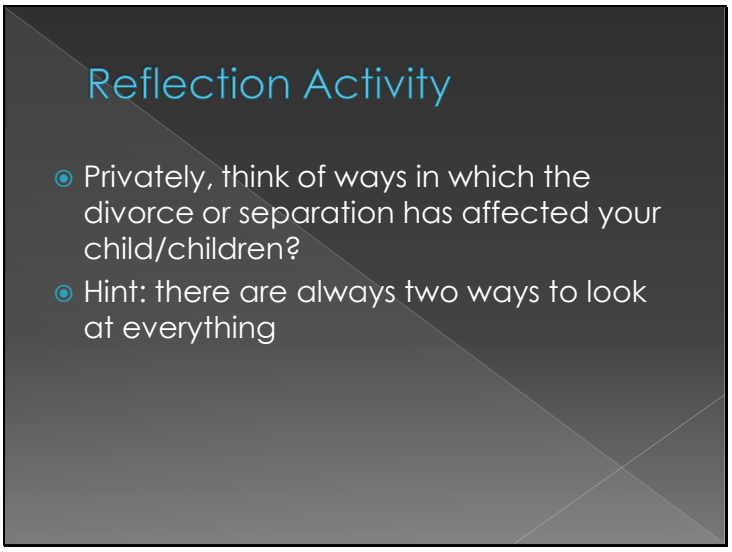
Slide 15


Moving. The stress associated with moving leads to negative consequences for children of divorce socially. The child may move into a new area where they have no friends and have to attend a new school. The process of leaving behind old friends and trying to find new friends can lead to social isolation. In contrast, the children who keep in contact with their friends adjust better to the move.
Moving means that now some children have two homes that they split their time between. The children highlight this as being very difficult as they have to pack bags all the time and it disrupts their normal routine.
Altered family structure. Many children see less contact with one parent as a positive result due to decreased conflict and decreased anxiety in the household. The other two conditions that make the divorce problematic for the child are if the change was sudden or if there is less contact with one of the child's parents.
Effects of divorce on children
Moving
Altered family structure

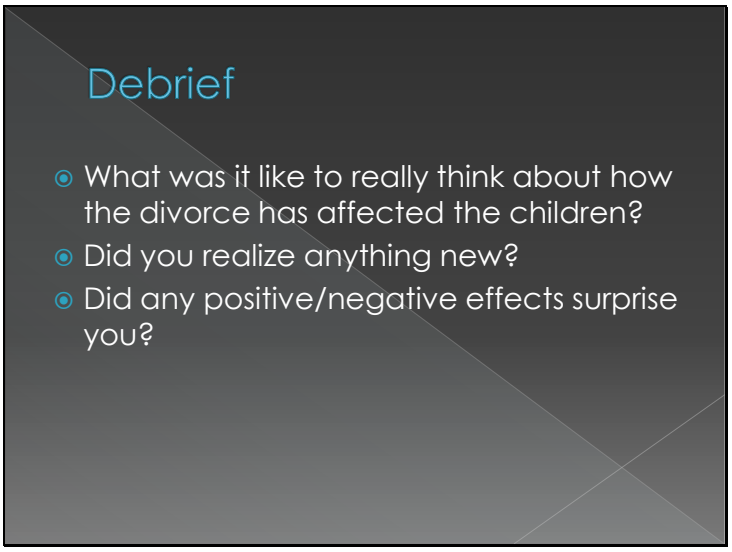
Slide 16


Educational concerns
Information flow
Emotional difficulties
Effects of divorce
Information flow. In the study by Butler et al. (2002) one-third of the children shared that they believed no one had told them about the divorce directly. On the other hand, all the parents of these children reported that they told their child about the divorce. There appears to a bit of a disconnect between what the parents report doing and how the child remembers or perceives the flow of information.
Emotional difficulties. Increased levels of anger and sadness
unpredictable meltdowns and difficulty being away from parents (worry parents won't come back).
Educational concerns. Academic problems often become an issue as children have trouble concentrating in class with all the changes going on in their lives.
Mental health problems may contribute to their academic problems, as sleeping and eating disturbances will affect school work

Slide 17

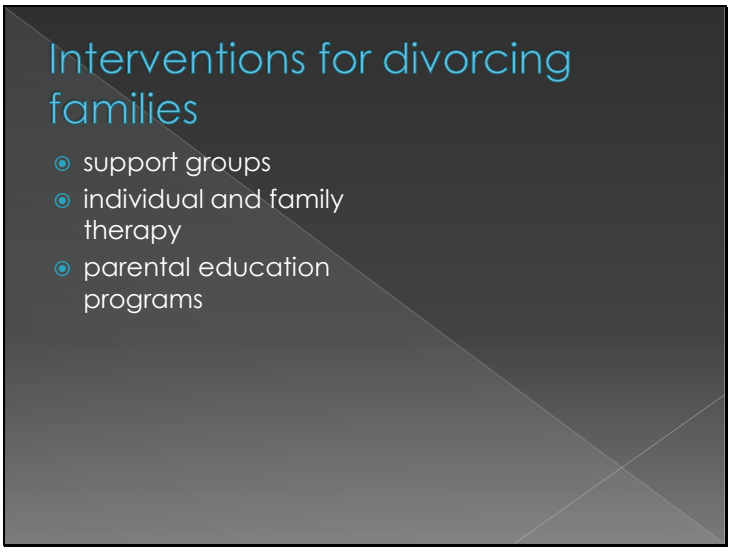

Reflection Activity
Privately, think of ways in which the divorce or separation has affected your child/children?
Hint: there are always two ways to look at everything

Slide 18



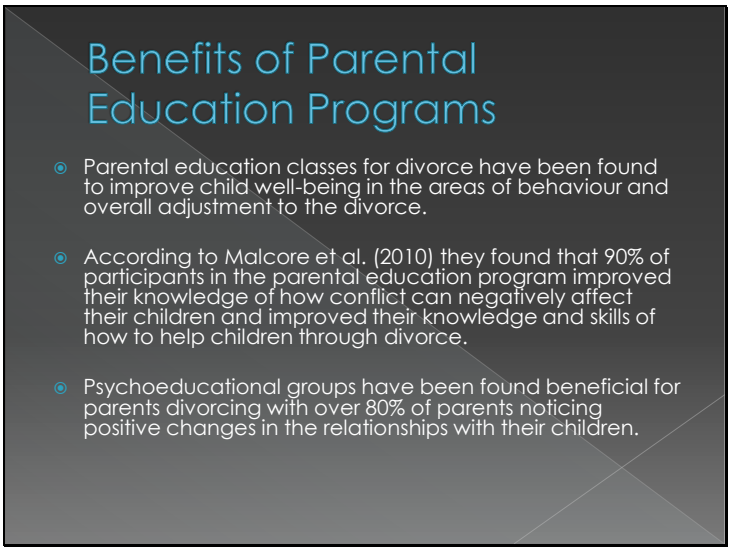
Stress the positives things and reframe any negative as areas to improve.

Slide 19

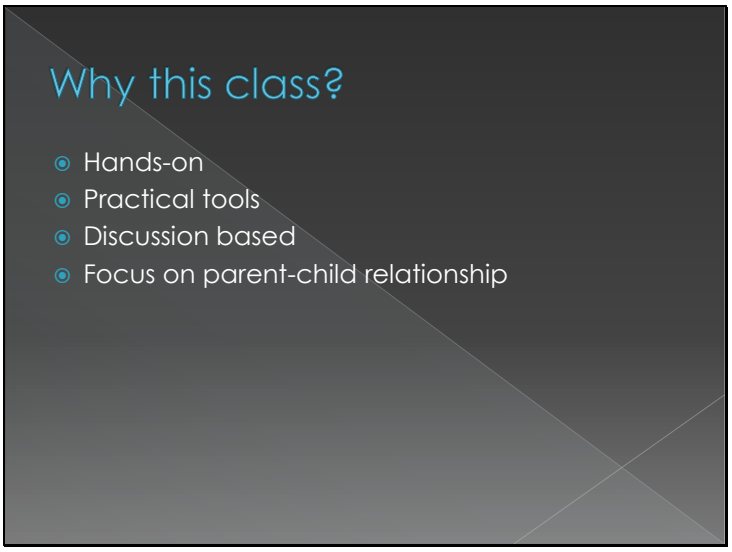


If you are concerned about how the divorce is affecting you or your child, these interventions are options. Consult the worksheets and handouts for a list of resources.

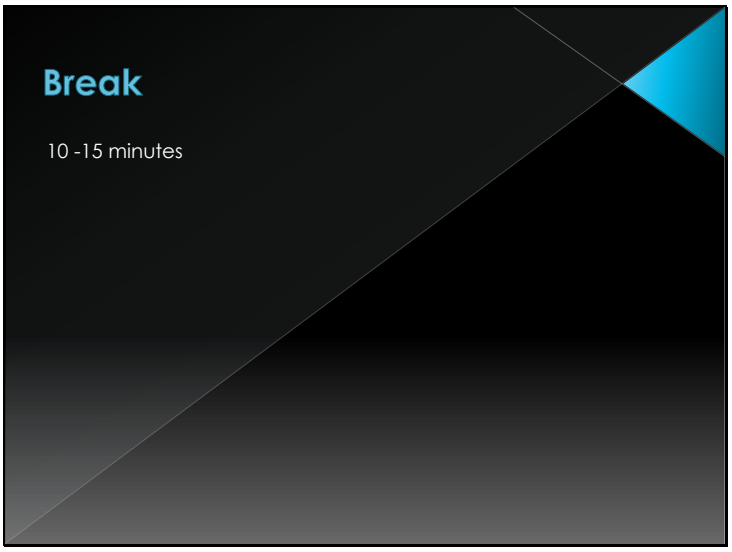
Slide 20


Benefits of Parental Education Programs
Parental education classes for divorce have been found to improve child well-being in the areas of behaviour and overall adjustment to the divorce.
According to Malcore et al. (2010) they found that 90% of participants in the parental education program improved their knowledge of how conflict can negatively affect their children and improved their knowledge and skills of how to help children through divorce.
Psychoeducational groups have been found beneficial for parents divorcing with over 80% of parents noticing positive changes in the relationships with their children.

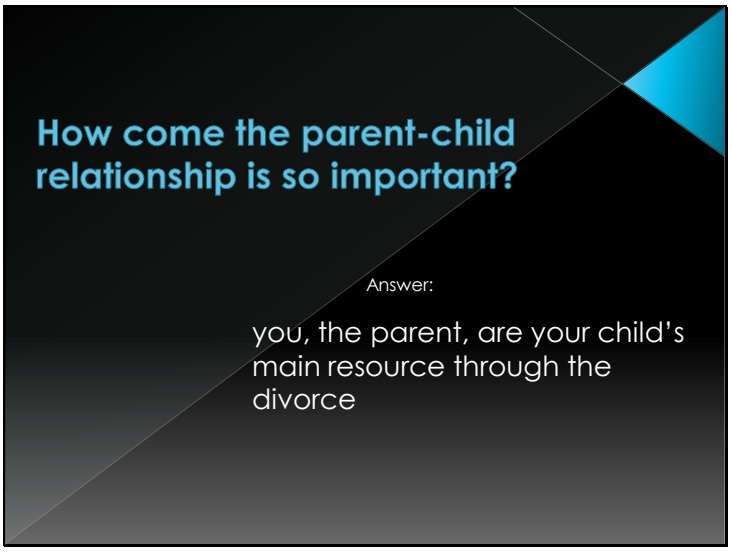
Slide 21


Why this class?
Hands-on
Practical tools
Discussion based
Focus on parent-child relationship

Slide 22

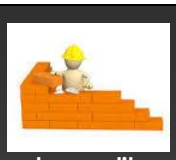


Slide 23


How come the parent-child relationship is so important?
Answer:
you, the parent, are your child's main resource through the divorce

Slide 24

The Foundation



- The **main source of resiliency will always be quality parenting** seen through simple, everyday interactions between parents and children.

  If parenting were compared to building a house, this would be the foundation.

- These are things such as communication, active-listening, having empathy, and creating clear expectations for behaviour.

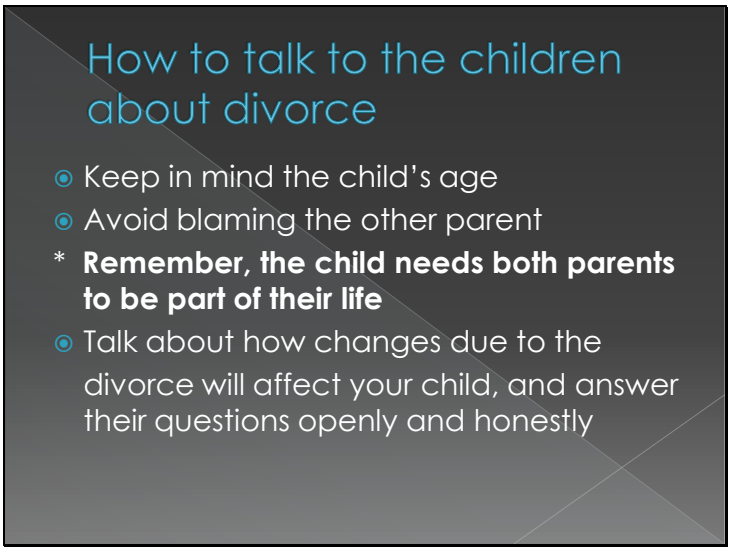
- Kids will benefit even if only one parent is able to do this.

Slide 25

#1-Take care of yourself!!
Good parenting requires
•time
•energy
•emotion

Slide 26

Slide 27

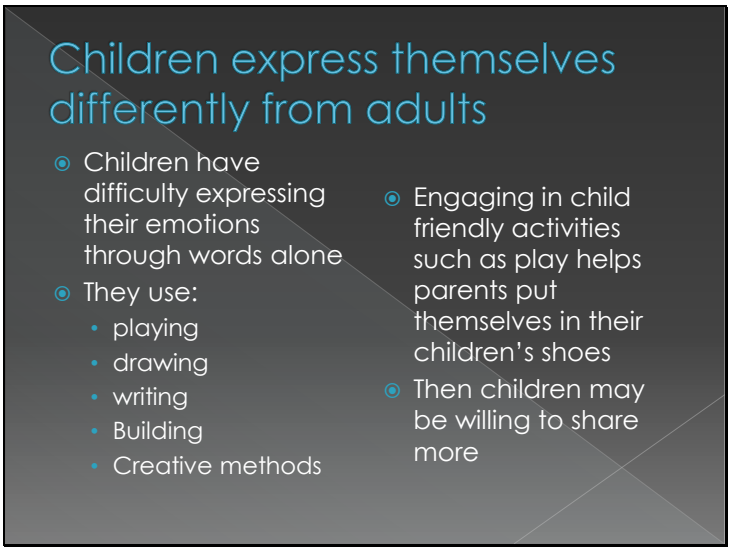


As we talked about earlier, children often do not understand what is happening to them unless you talk with them about it and allow them to ask questions.

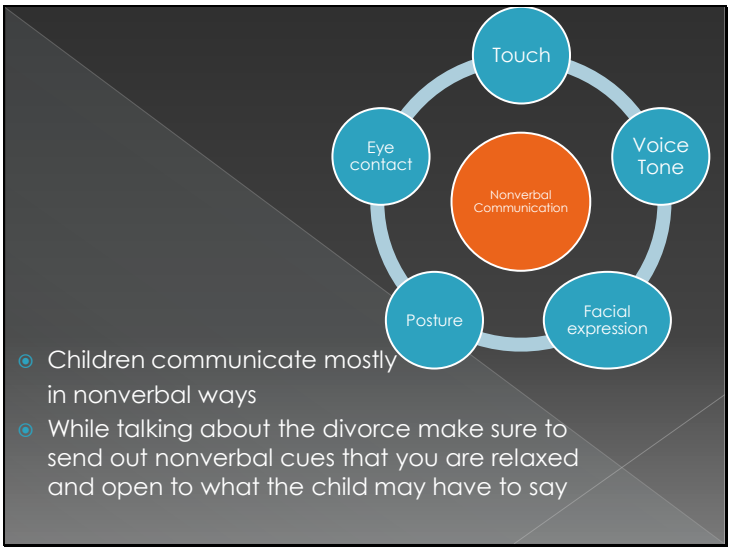
Slide 28

Ask the class to brainstorm a few ideas.

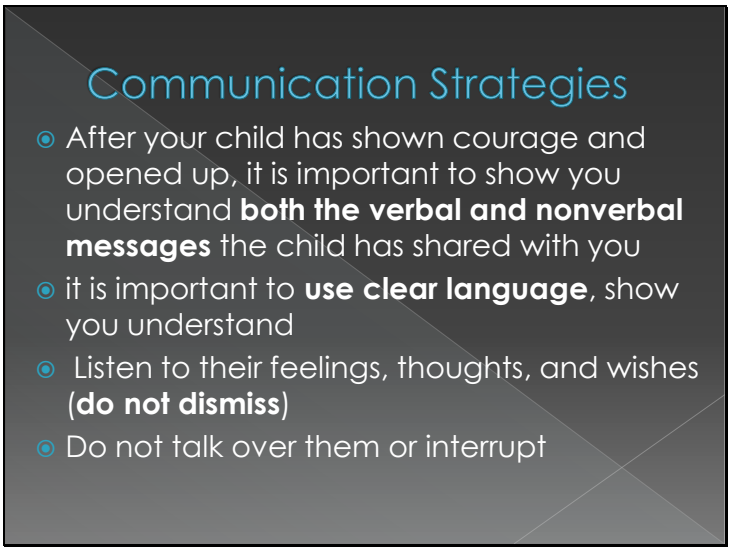
Slide 29


Children express themselves differently from adults
Children have difficulty expressing their emotions through words alone
They use:
playing
drawing
writing
Building
Creative methods
Engaging in child friendly activities such as play helps parents put themselves in their children's shoes
Then children may be willing to share more

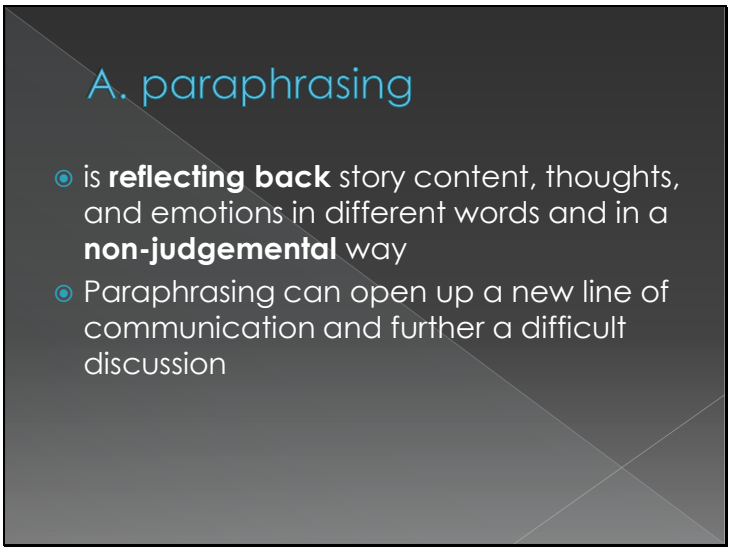
Slide 30


Touch
Eye contact
Voice Tone
Nonverbal Communication
Posture
Facial expression
Children communicate mostly in nonverbal ways
While talking about the divorce make sure to send out nonverbal cues that you are relaxed and open to what the child may have to say

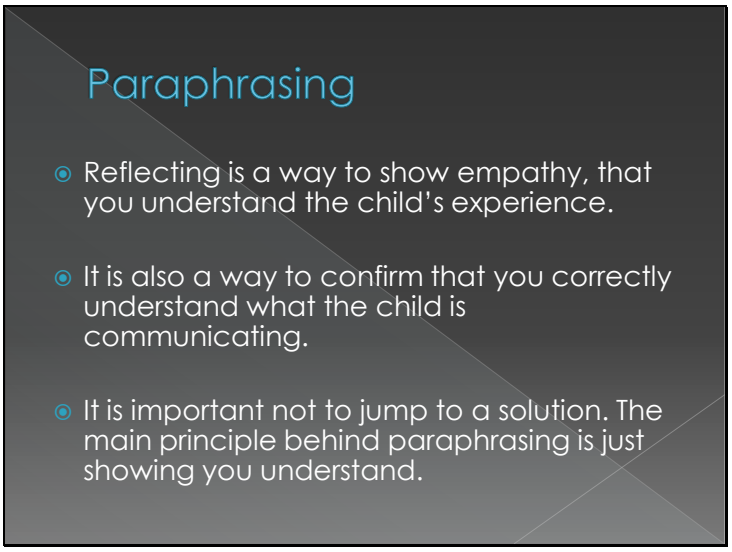
Slide 31


Communication Strategies
After your child has shown courage and opened up, it is important to show you understand **both the verbal and nonverbal messages** the child has shared with you
it is important to **use clear language**, show you understand
Listen to their feelings, thoughts, and wishes (**do not dismiss**)
Do not talk over them or interrupt

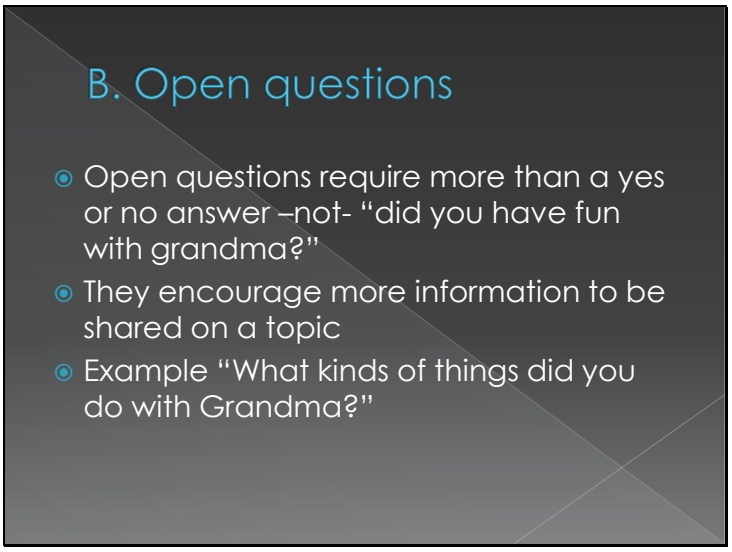
Slide 32


A. paraphrasing
is **reflecting back** story content, thoughts, and emotions in different words and in a **non-judgemental** way
Paraphrasing can open up a new line of communication and further a difficult discussion

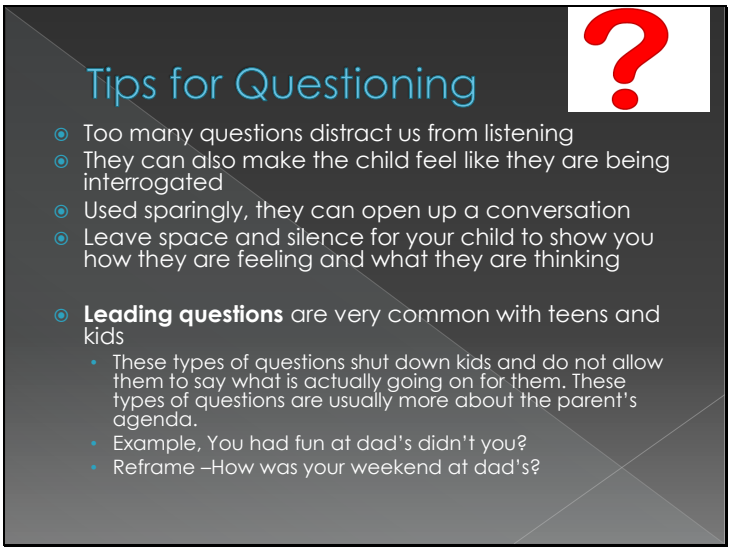
Slide 33


Paraphrasing
Reflecting is a way to show empathy, that you understand the child's experience.
It is also a way to confirm that you correctly understand what the child is communicating.
It is important not to jump to a solution. The main principle behind paraphrasing is just showing you understand.

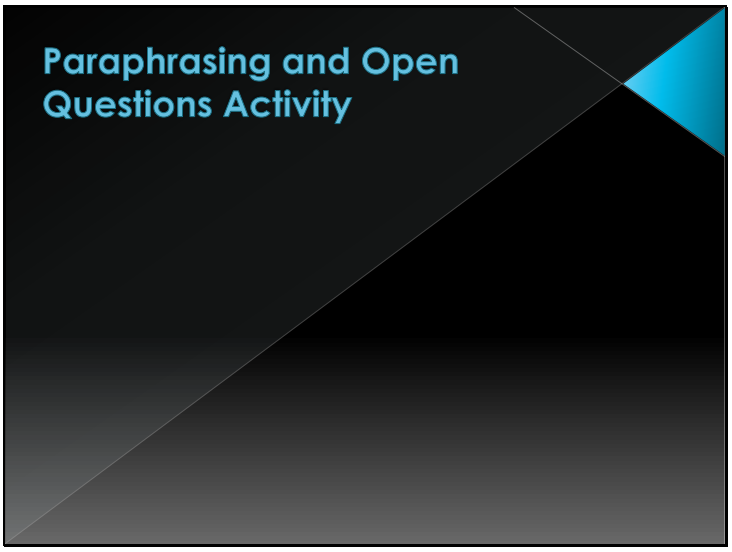
Slide 34


B. Open questions
Open questions require more than a yes or no answer –not- "did you have fun with grandma?"
They encourage more information to be shared on a topic
Example "What kinds of things did you do with Grandma?"

Slide 35

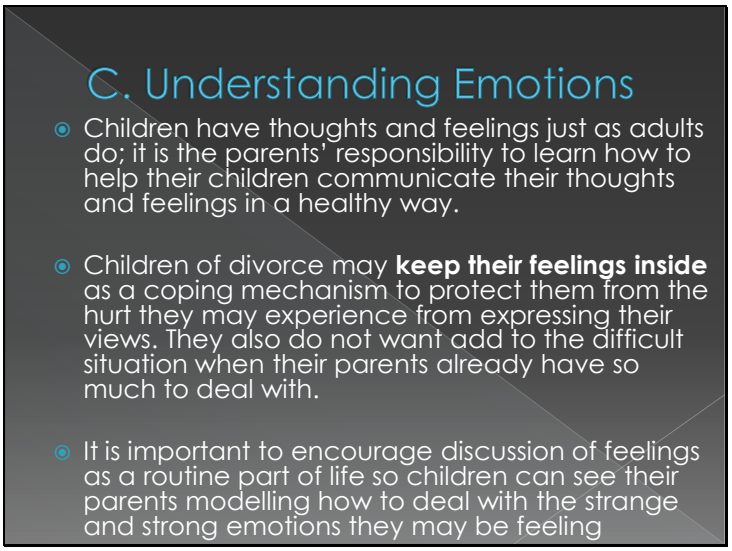

Tips for Questioning
Too many questions distract us from listening
They can also make the child feel like they are being interrogated
Used sparingly, they can open up a conversation
Leave space and silence for your child to show you how they are feeling and what they are thinking
Leading questions are very common with teens and kids
These types of questions shut down kids and do not allow them to say what is actually going on for them. These types of questions are usually more about the parent's agenda.
Example, You had fun at dad's didn't you?
Reframe –How was your weekend at dad's?

Slide 36

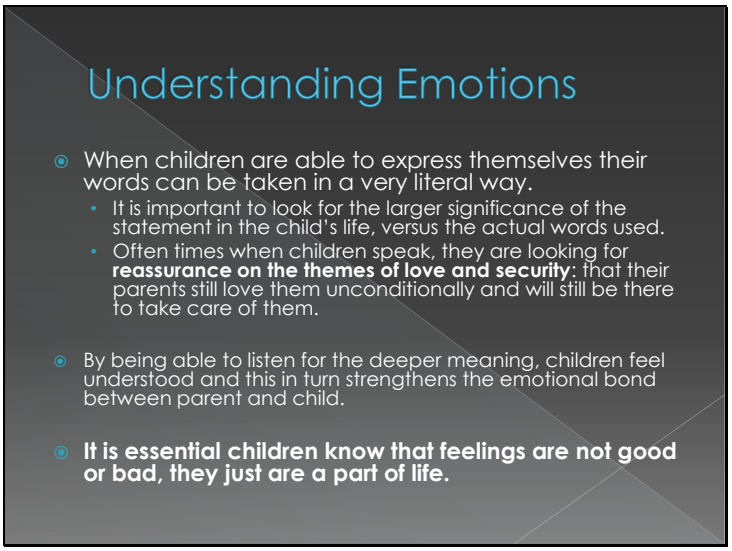


This is located in the worksheets and handouts section.

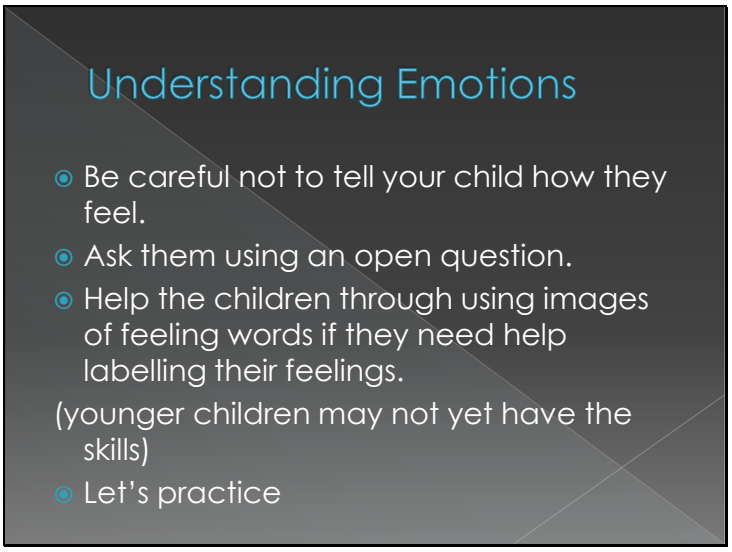
Slide 37


C. Understanding Emotions
Children have thoughts and feelings just as adults do; it is the parents' responsibility to learn how to help their children communicate their thoughts and feelings in a healthy way.
Children of divorce may keep their feelings inside as a coping mechanism to protect them from the hurt they may experience from expressing their views. They also do not want add to the difficult situation when their parents already have so much to deal with.
It is important to encourage discussion of feelings as a routine part of life so children can see their parents modelling how to deal with the strange and strong emotions they may be feeling

Slide 38


Understanding Emotions
When children are able to express themselves their words can be taken in a very literal way.
It is important to look for the larger significance of the statement in the child's life, versus the actual words used.
Often times when children speak, they are looking for reassurance on the themes of love and security: that their parents still love them unconditionally and will still be there to take care of them.
By being able to listen for the deeper meaning, children feel understood and this in turn strengthens the emotional bond between parent and child.
It is essential children know that feelings are not good or bad, they just are a part of life.

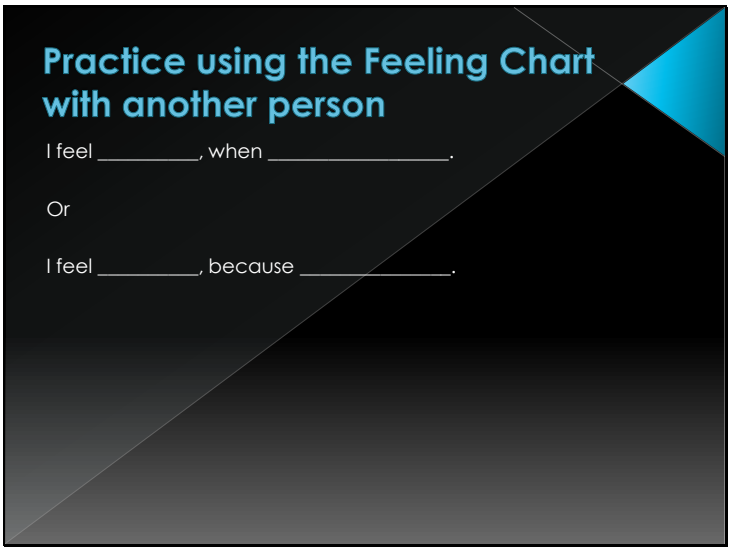
Slide 39


Understanding Emotions
Be careful not to tell your child how they feel.
Ask them using an open question.
Help the children through using images of feeling words if they need help labelling their feelings.
(younger children may not yet have the skills)
Let's practice

Slide 40

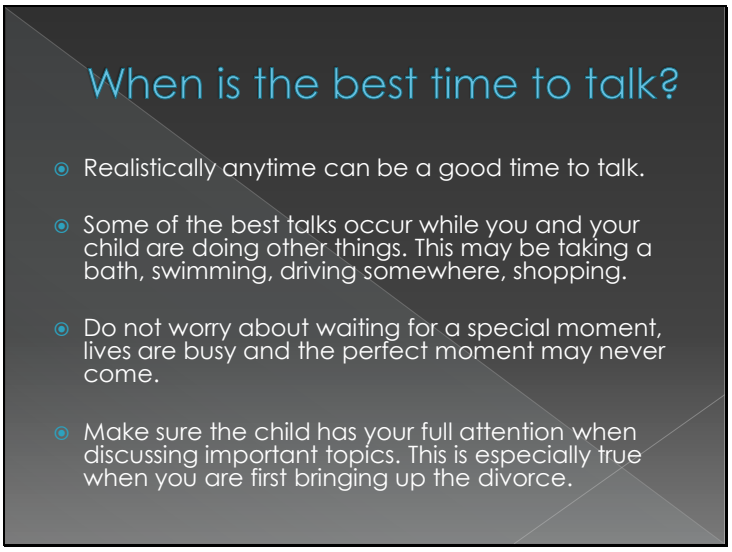
These are some common feeling words paired with pictures to use with younger kids. If you or your child are looking for a greater range of words check out “how are you feeling” in the worksheets and handouts.

Slide 41

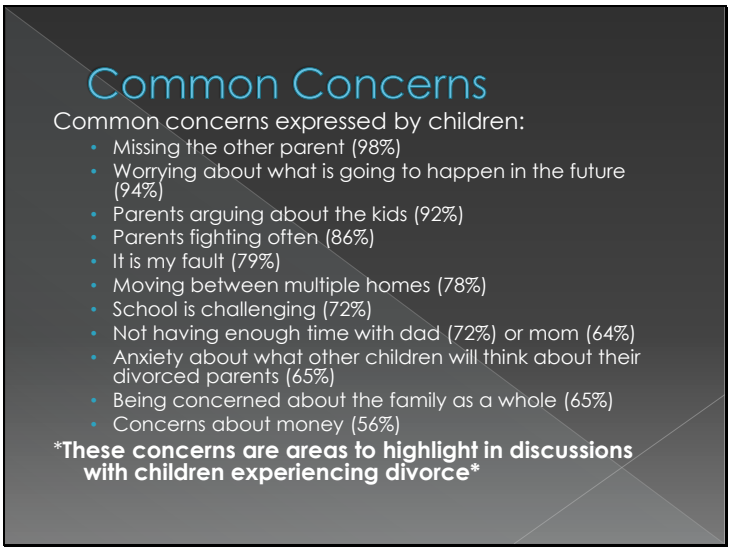

Practice using the Feeling Chart with another person
I feel _____, when _____.
Or
I feel _____, because _____.

Slide 42

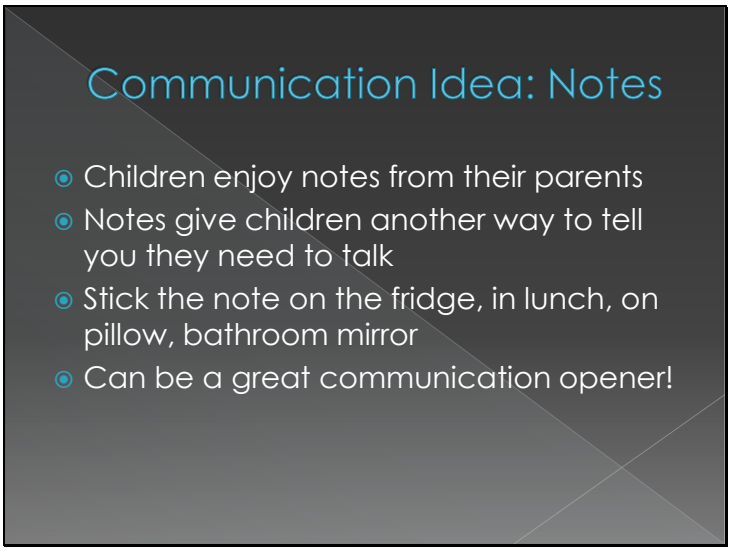
Slide 43


When is the best time to talk?
Realistically anytime can be a good time to talk.
Some of the best talks occur while you and your child are doing other things. This may be taking a bath, swimming, driving somewhere, shopping.
Do not worry about waiting for a special moment, lives are busy and the perfect moment may never come.
Make sure the child has your full attention when discussing important topics. This is especially true when you are first bringing up the divorce.

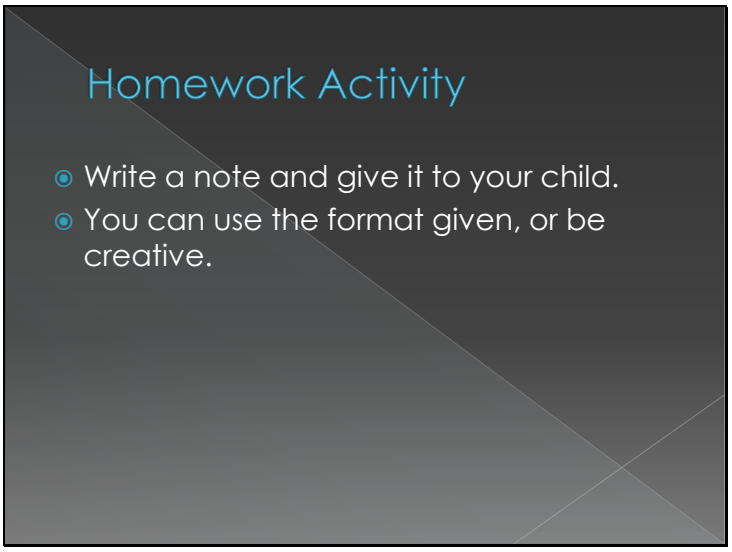
Slide 44


Common Concerns
Common concerns expressed by children:
Missing the other parent (98%)
Worrying about what is going to happen in the future (94%)
Parents arguing about the kids (92%)
Parents fighting often (86%)
It is my fault (79%)
Moving between multiple homes (78%)
School is challenging (72%)
Not having enough time with dad (72%) or mom (64%)
Anxiety about what other children will think about their divorced parents (65%)
Being concerned about the family as a whole (65%)
Concerns about money (56%)
These concerns are areas to highlight in discussions with children experiencing divorce

Slide 45

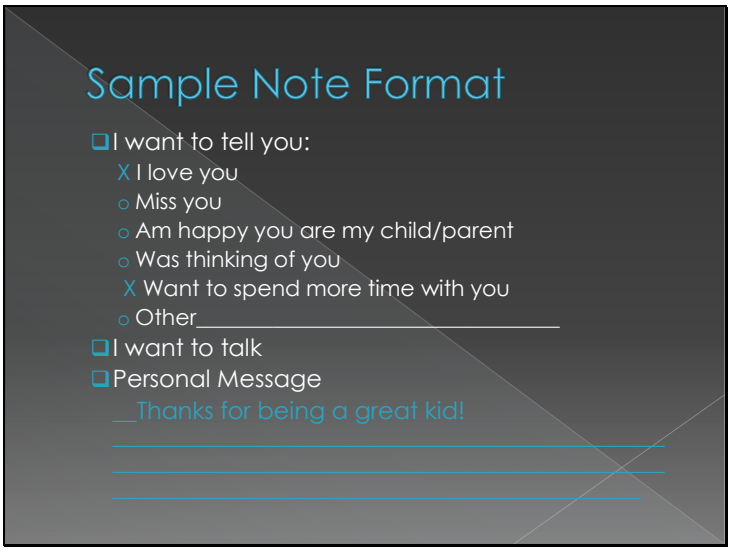

Communication Idea: Notes
Children enjoy notes from their parents
Notes give children another way to tell you they need to talk
Stick the note on the fridge, in lunch, on pillow, bathroom mirror
Can be a great communication opener!

Slide 46



Homework Activity can be found in the worksheets and handouts package.

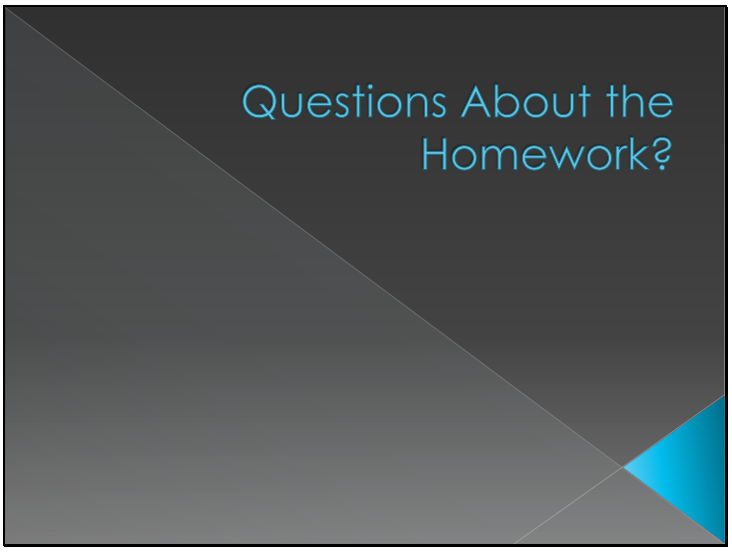
Slide 47



Be creative, write on a post-it, send a facebook message, send a text. Give a copy for them to respond with too.

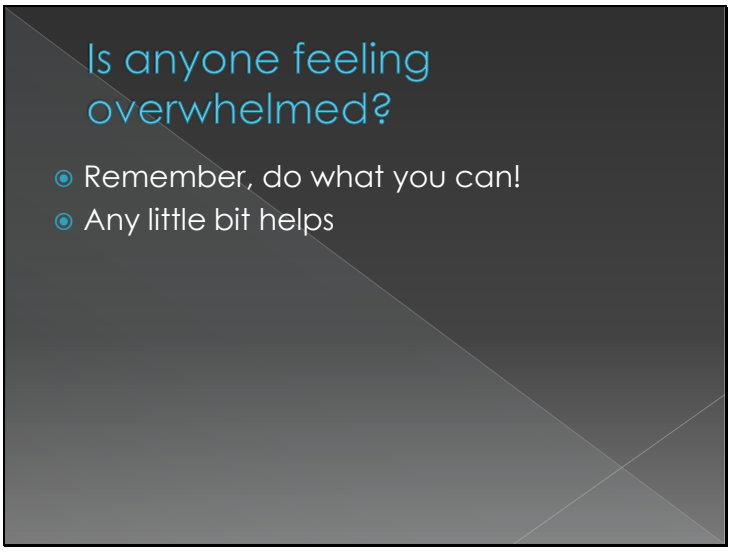
You fill it out and then have your child fill one out for you. It opens the communication barrier.

Slide 48

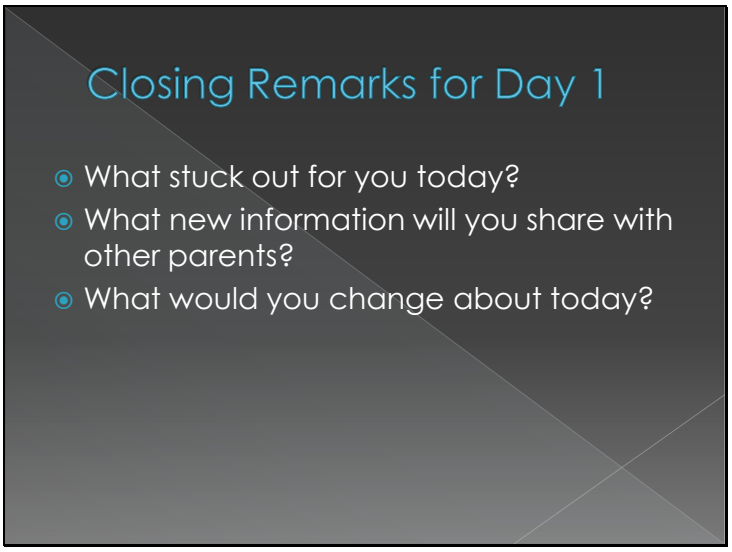


Try out using the note and other communication strategies this week. We will discuss how things went next time. You can bring in examples if you would like.

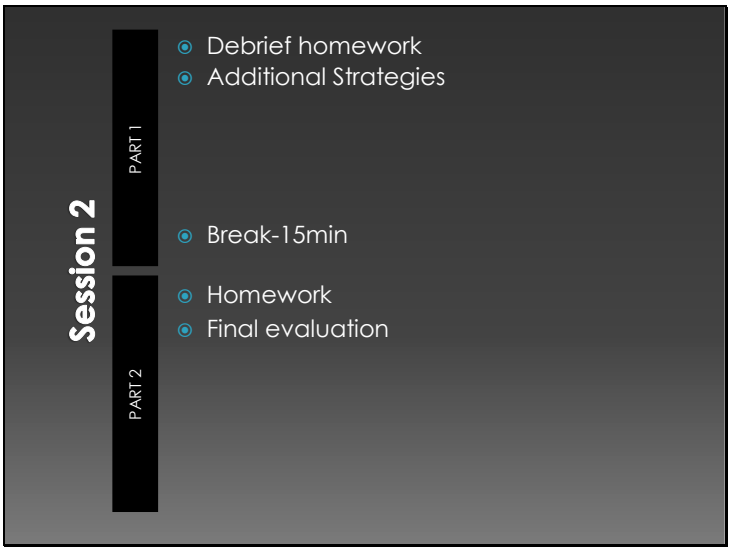
Slide 49


Is anyone feeling overwhelmed?
Remember, do what you can!
Any little bit helps

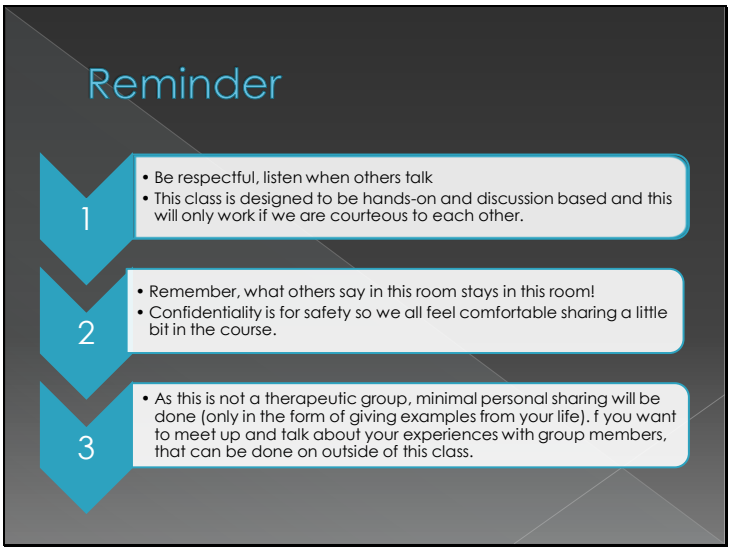
Slide 50


Closing Remarks for Day 1
What stuck out for you today?
What new information will you share with other parents?
What would you change about today?

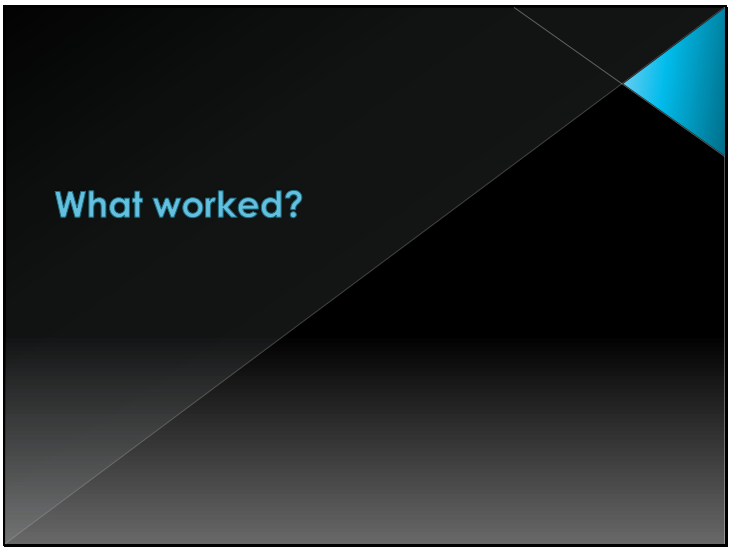
Slide 51


Session 2
PART 1
PART 2
Debrief homework
Additional Strategies
Break-15min
Homework
Final evaluation

Slide 52

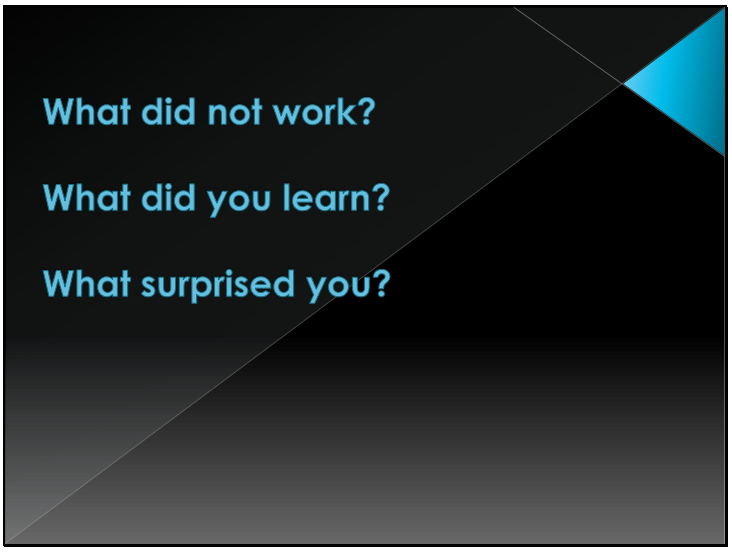

Reminder
1
• Be respectful, listen when others talk
• This class is designed to be hands-on and discussion based and this will only work if we are courteous to each other.
2
• Remember, what others say in this room stays in this room!
• Confidentiality is for safety so we all feel comfortable sharing a little bit in the course.
3
• As this is not a therapeutic group, minimal personal sharing will be done (only in the form of giving examples from your life). f you want to meet up and talk about your experiences with group members, that can be done on outside of this class.

Slide 53

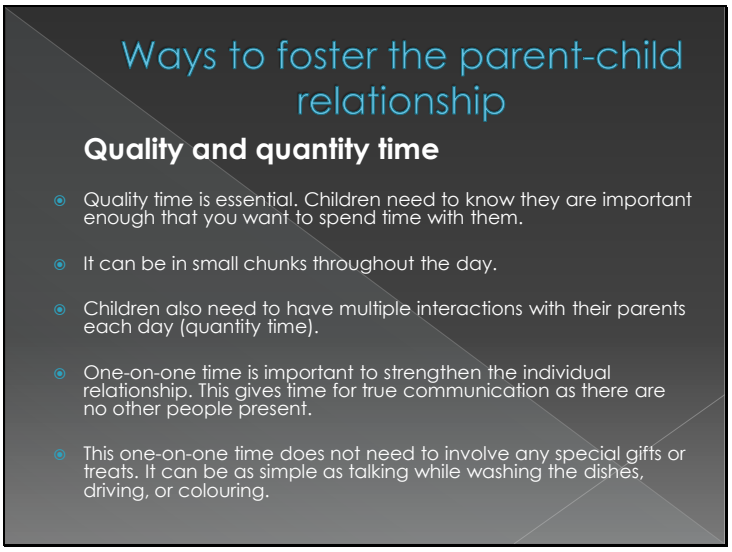


Facilitated discussion for 20 min

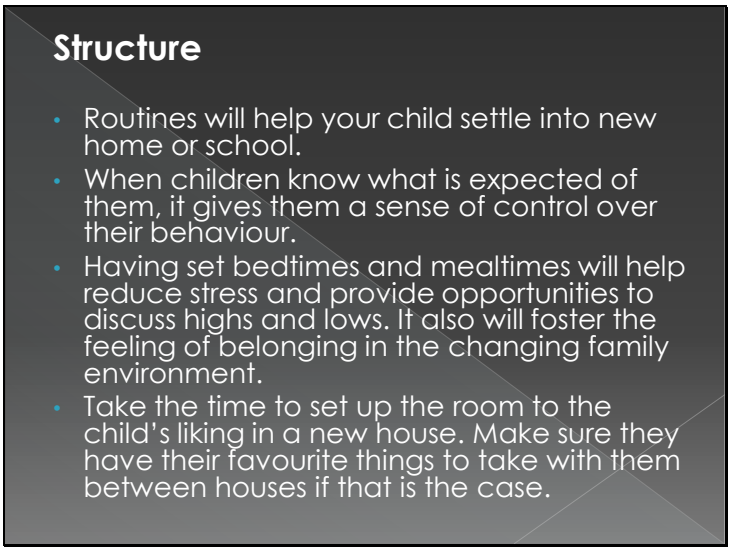
Slide 54



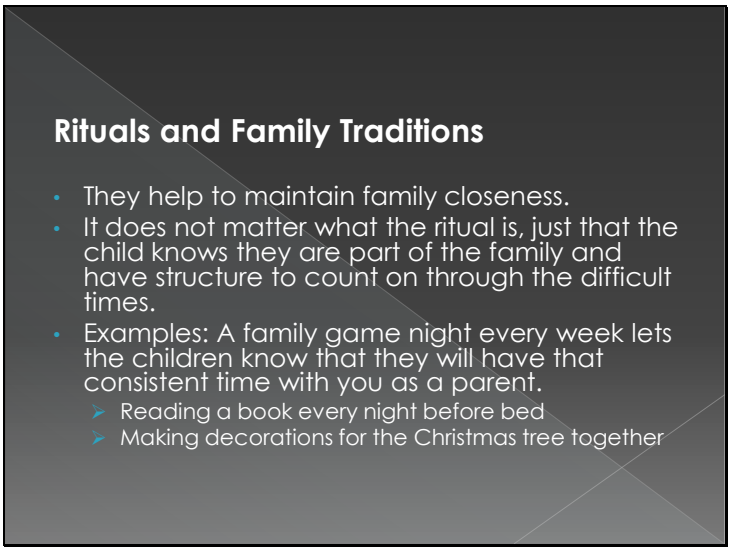
Slide 55


Ways to foster the parent-child relationship
Quality and quantity time
Quality time is essential. Children need to know they are important enough that you want to spend time with them.
It can be in small chunks throughout the day.
Children also need to have multiple interactions with their parents each day (quantity time).
One-on-one time is important to strengthen the individual relationship. This gives time for true communication as there are no other people present.
This one-on-one time does not need to involve any special gifts or treats. It can be as simple as talking while washing the dishes, driving, or colouring.

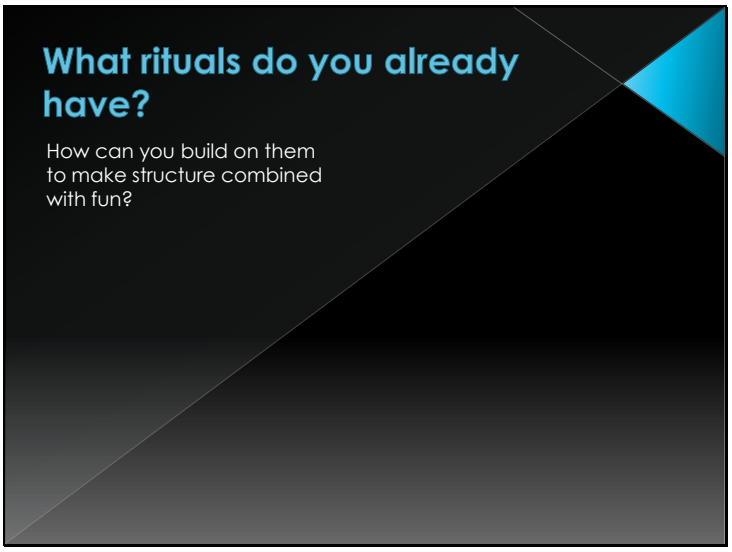
Slide 56


Structure
Routines will help your child settle into new home or school.
When children know what is expected of them, it gives them a sense of control over their behaviour.
Having set bedtimes and mealtimes will help reduce stress and provide opportunities to discuss highs and lows. It also will foster the feeling of belonging in the changing family environment.
Take the time to set up the room to the child's liking in a new house. Make sure they have their favourite things to take with them between houses if that is the case.

Slide 57


Rituals and Family Traditions
They help to maintain family closeness.
It does not matter what the ritual is, just that the child knows they are part of the family and have structure to count on through the difficult times.
Examples: A family game night every week lets the children know that they will have that consistent time with you as a parent.
Reading a book every night before bed
Making decorations for the Christmas tree together

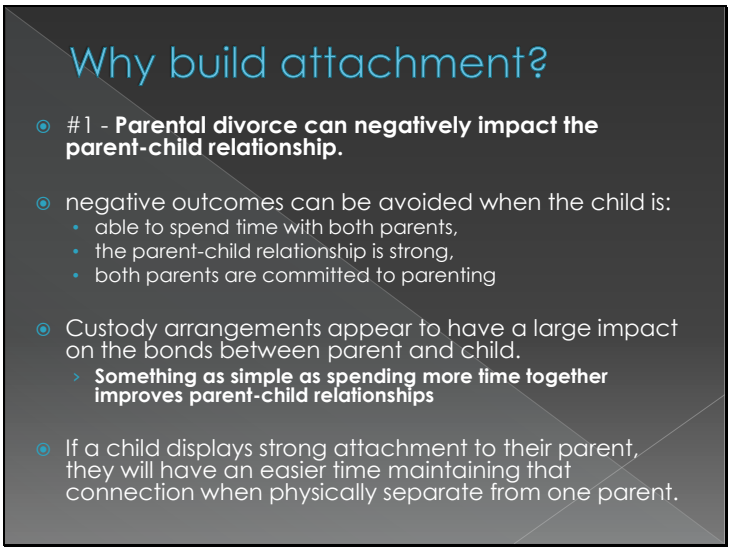
Slide 58


What rituals do you already have?
How can you build on them to make structure combined with fun?

Slide 59

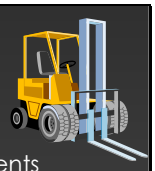
Attachment
Attachment is like a house's foundation, without it, the house will fall down.
The same is true of your relationship with your child.
With a good strong foundation, you can build a beautiful, sturdy relationship that can weather any storm.

Slide 60


Why build attachment?
#1 - Parental divorce can negatively impact the parent-child relationship.
negative outcomes can be avoided when the child is:
able to spend time with both parents,
the parent-child relationship is strong,
both parents are committed to parenting
Custody arrangements appear to have a large impact on the bonds between parent and child.
Something as simple as spending more time together improves parent-child relationships
If a child displays strong attachment to their parent, they will have an easier time maintaining that connection when physically separate from one parent.

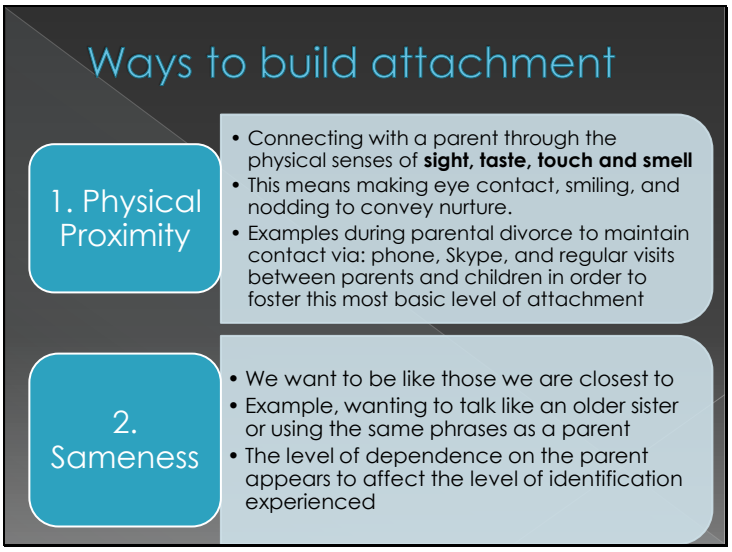
Slide 61

Ways to build attachment



- **Relationships** are the basis for forming attachments and being able to develop into healthy adults.
- Positive relationships are characterized by someone who is:
  - present
  - accessible
  - responsive
  - displays unconditional love.
- **Love and acceptance**
  - Tell your child you love them often!
  - Never assume that the child knows.
  - Highlight their strengths so that they can feel positively about themselves

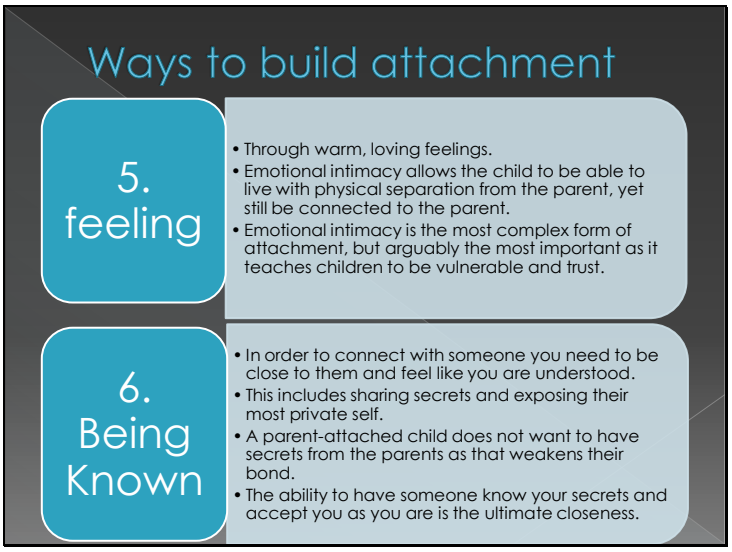
Slide 62


Ways to build attachment
1. Physical Proximity
• Connecting with a parent through the physical senses of **sight, taste, touch and smell**
• This means making eye contact, smiling, and nodding to convey nurture.
• Examples during parental divorce to maintain contact via: phone, Skype, and regular visits between parents and children in order to foster this most basic level of attachment
2. Sameness
• We want to be like those we are closest to
• Example, wanting to talk like an older sister or using the same phrases as a parent
• The level of dependence on the parent appears to affect the level of identification experienced

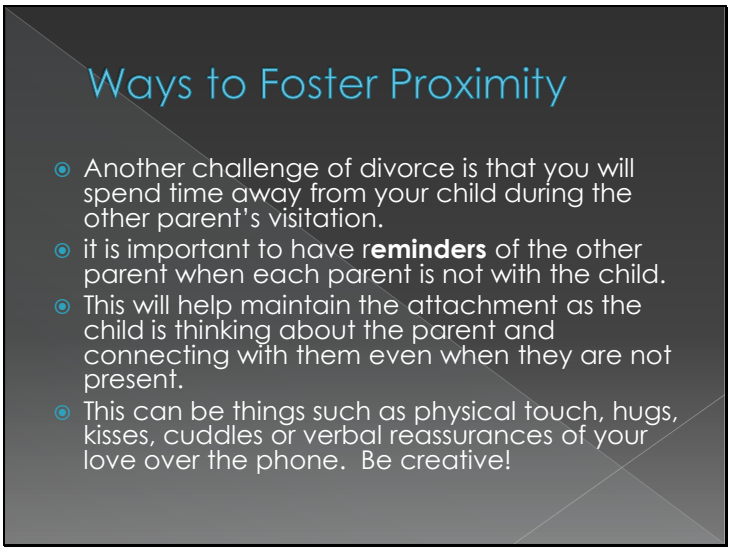
Slide 63

Ways to build attachment
3. Belonging and loyalty
• Children choose figures that are important to them.
• They want to be close to these people and are loyal to them
• For example, stating this is my sister and my mom. The child will keep the sisters secrets and defend their parents.
4. Significance
• We want to feel important and like we belong.
• Children need their parents to fill this need so that they do not look to other places/people
• Parents are a safe place to feel that unconditional love associated with belonging as they tend to be most sensitive to the child's needs.
• Examples: including children in family activities, traditions, giving younger children special tasks. It can even be as simple as through a hug and saying "I love you".

Slide 64

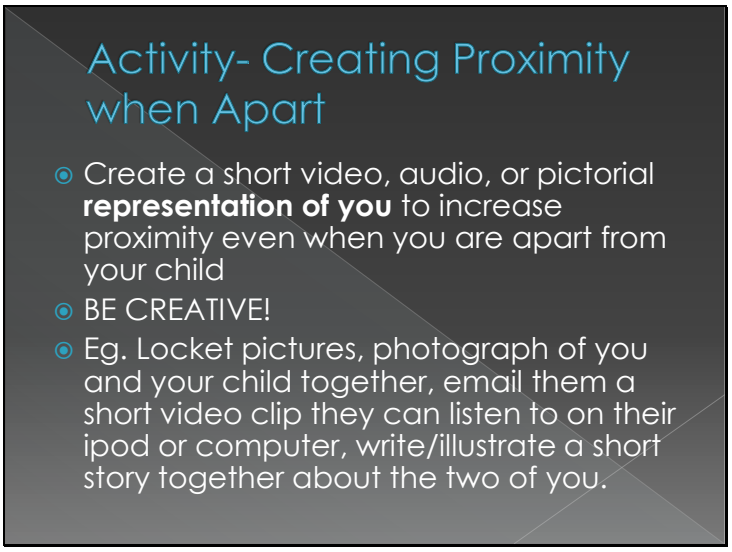

Ways to build attachment
5. feeling
• Through warm, loving feelings.
• Emotional intimacy allows the child to be able to live with physical separation from the parent, yet still be connected to the parent.
• Emotional intimacy is the most complex form of attachment, but arguably the most important as it teaches children to be vulnerable and trust.
6. Being Known
• In order to connect with someone you need to be close to them and feel like you are understood.
• This includes sharing secrets and exposing their most private self.
• A parent-attached child does not want to have secrets from the parents as that weakens their bond.
• The ability to have someone know your secrets and accept you as you are is the ultimate closeness.

Slide 65

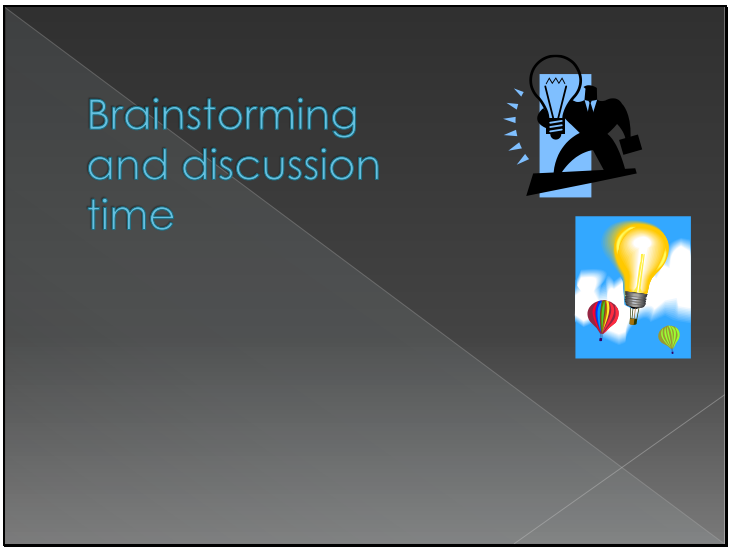


We are going to focus on Proximity as an in-depth example.

Slide 66

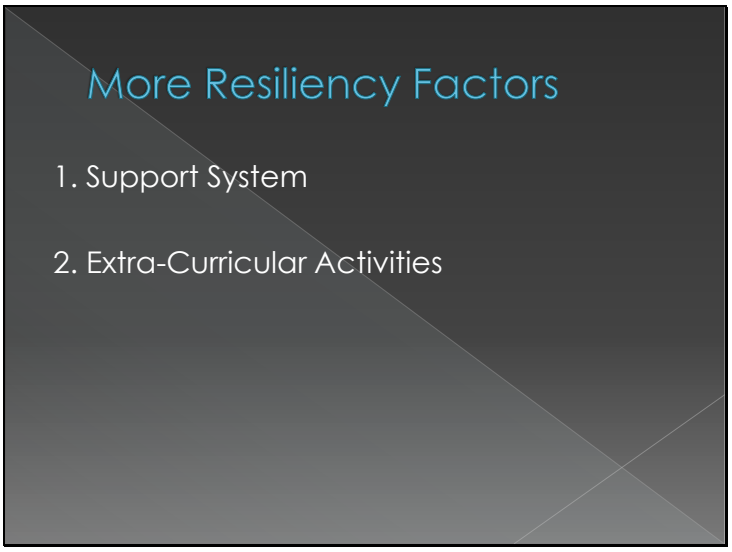

Activity- Creating Proximity when Apart
Create a short video, audio, or pictorial representation of you to increase proximity even when you are apart from your child
BE CREATIVE!
Eg. Locket pictures, photograph of you and your child together, email them a short video clip they can listen to on their ipod or computer, write/illustrate a short story together about the two of you.

Slide 67

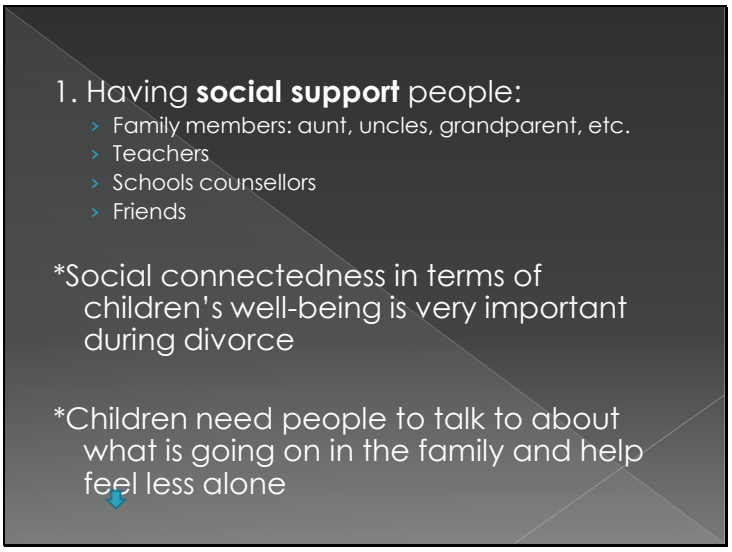


Go home and put this into action!

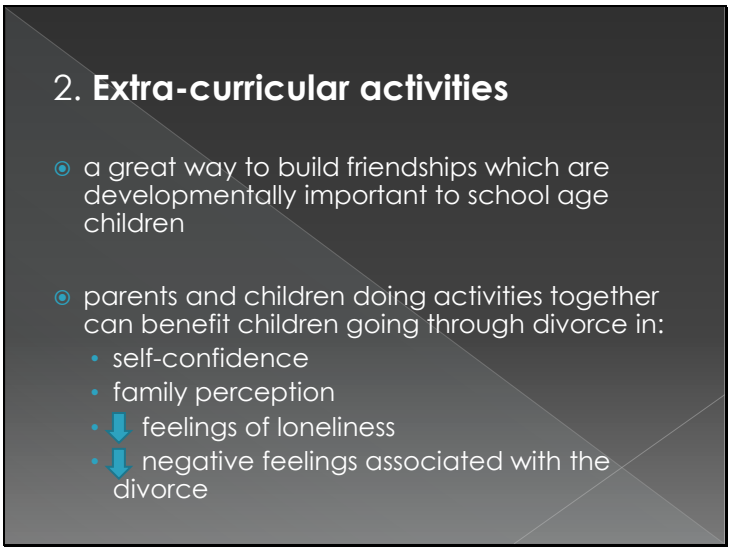
Slide 68


More Resiliency Factors
1. Support System
2. Extra-Curricular Activities

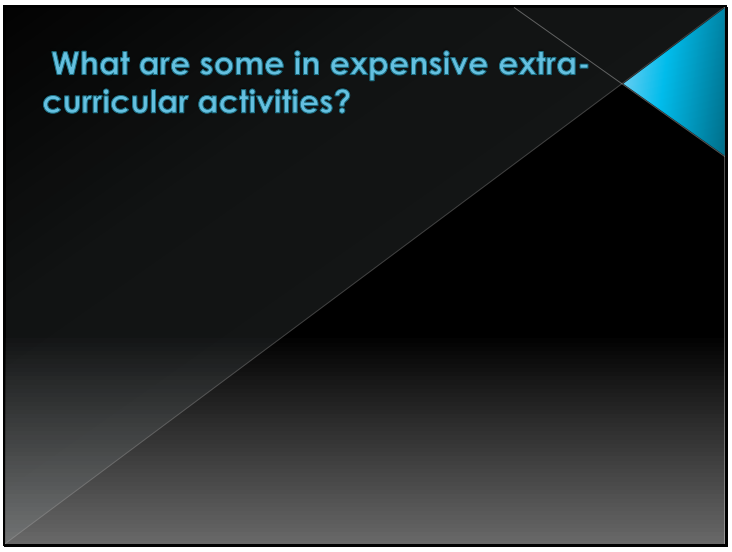
Slide 69


1. Having **social support** people:
Family members: aunt, uncles, grandparent, etc.
Teachers
Schools counsellors
Friends
*Social connectedness in terms of children's well-being is very important during divorce
*Children need people to talk to about what is going on in the family and help feel less alone

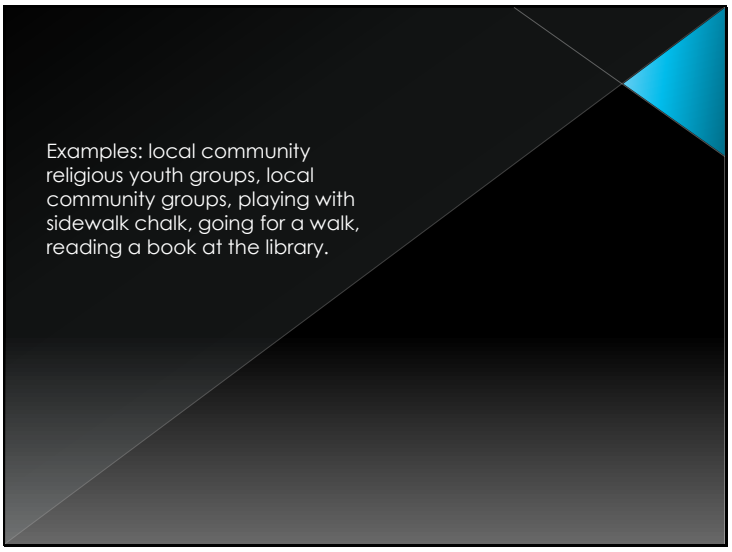
Slide 70


2. Extra-curricular activities
a great way to build friendships which are developmentally important to school age children
parents and children doing activities together can benefit children going through divorce in:
self-confidence
family perception
feelings of loneliness
negative feelings associated with the divorce

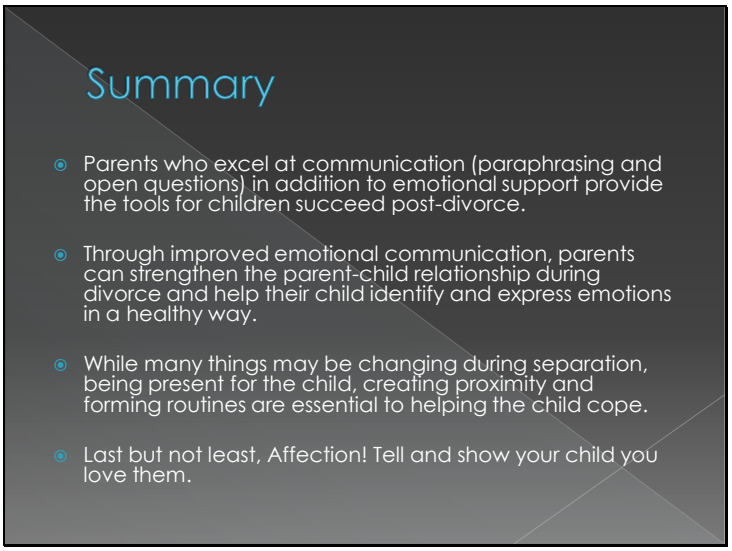
Slide 71



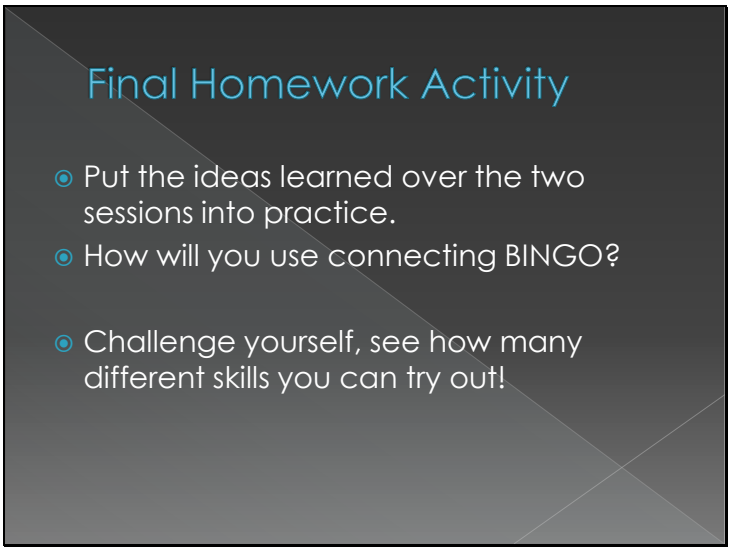
Slide 72


Examples: local community religious youth groups, local community groups, playing with sidewalk chalk, going for a walk, reading a book at the library.

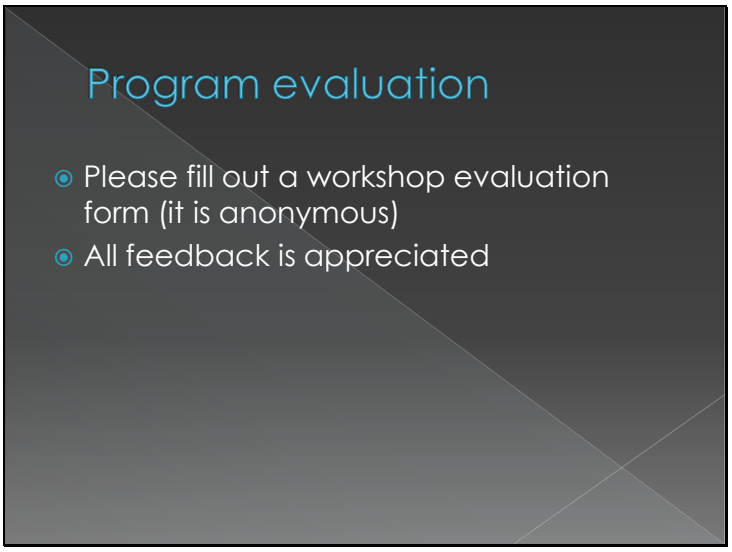
Slide 73


Summary
Parents who excel at communication (paraphrasing and open questions) in addition to emotional support provide the tools for children succeed post-divorce.
Through improved emotional communication, parents can strengthen the parent-child relationship during divorce and help their child identify and express emotions in a healthy way.
While many things may be changing during separation, being present for the child, creating proximity and forming routines are essential to helping the child cope.
Last but not least, Affection! Tell and show your child you love them.

Slide 74


Final Homework Activity
Put the ideas learned over the two sessions into practice.
How will you use connecting BINGO?
Challenge yourself, see how many different skills you can try out!

Slide 75


Program evaluation
Please fill out a workshop evaluation form (it is anonymous)
All feedback is appreciated

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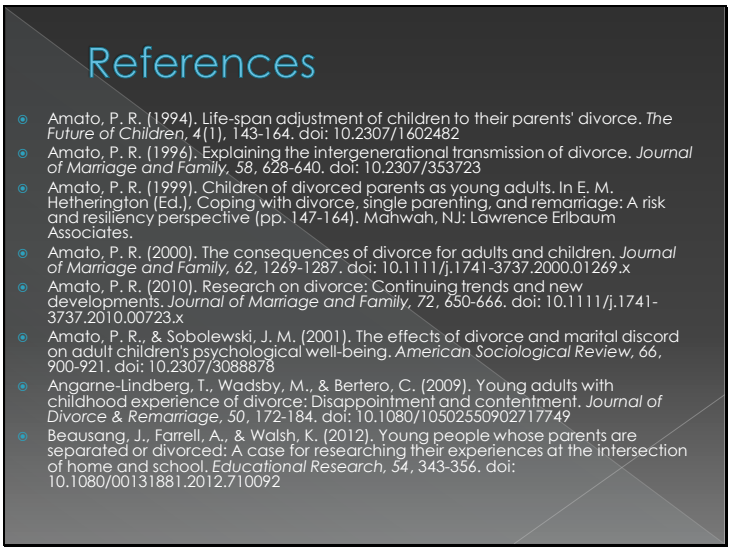
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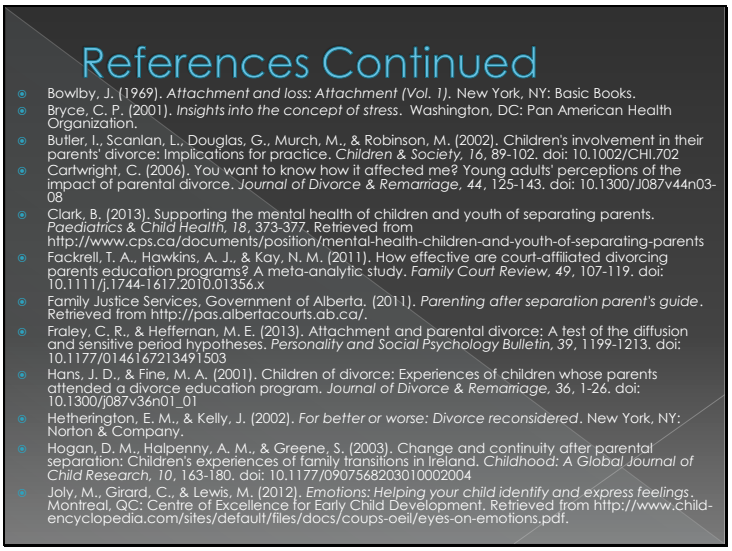
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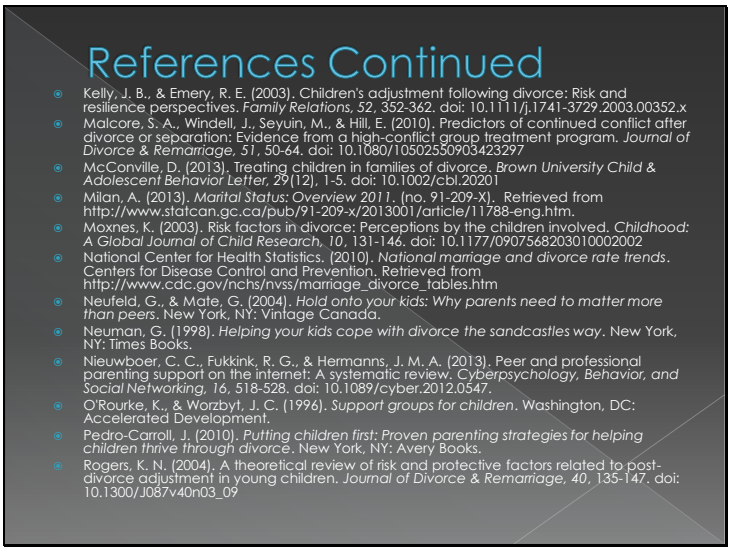
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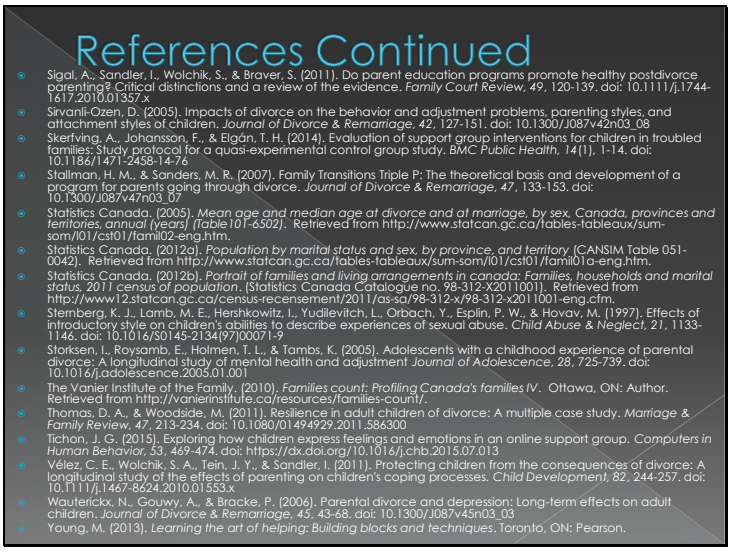
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Appendix D

Worksheets and Handouts

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Reflection Activity

1. Privately, think of ways in which the divorce or separation has affected your child/children?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

*Hint: there are always two ways to look at everything (both positive and negative and short-term and long-term)

2. What was it like to really think about how the divorce has affected the children?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Did any of your answers surprise you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Using Feeling Words

I feel _____, when

_____

Or

I feel _____, because

_____

List of Emotions

Amazed	Foolish	Overwhelmed
Angry	Frustrated	Peaceful
Annoyed	Furious	Proud
Anxious	Grieving	Relieved
Ashamed	Happy	Resentful
Bitter	Hopeful	Sad
Bored	Hurt	Satisfied
Comfortable	Inadequate	Scared
Confused	Insecure	Self-conscious
Content	Inspired	Shocked
Depressed	Irritated	Silly
Determined	Jealous	Stupid
Disdain	Joy	Suspicious
Disgusted	Lonely	Tense
Eager	Lost	Terrified
Embarrassed	Loving	Trapped
Energetic	Miserable	Uncomfortable
Envious	Motivated	Worried
Excited	Nervous	Worthless

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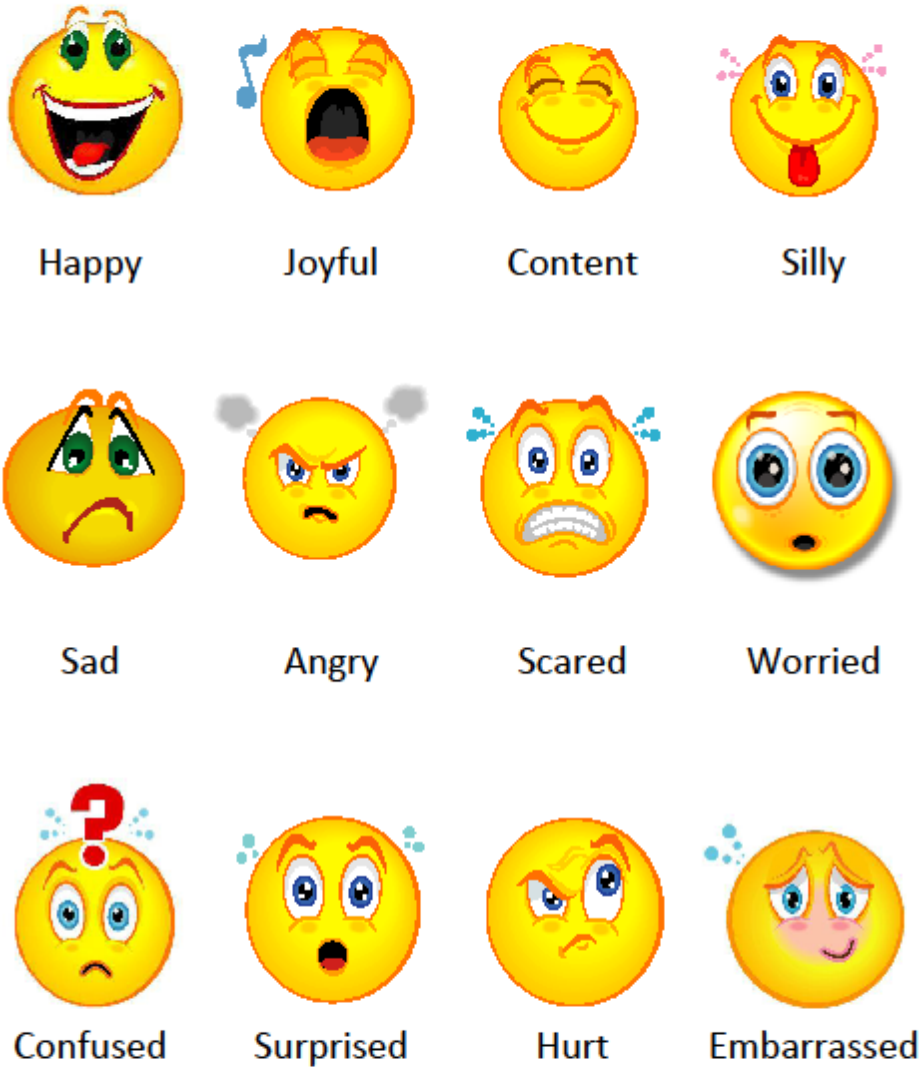
How are you feeling?



Courtesy of Priceless Parenting, http://www.PricelessParenting.com/

Priceless Parenting

Paraphrasing and Open Questions Practice

- Paraphrasing = same message different words, shows active listening
- Open Question = more than a yes or no response

1. Mom, are we going to Grandma's this weekend? I really want to.

   Paraphrase:

   You are excited to visit with Grandma, it's one of our traditions that is really important to you.

2. Cindy pushed me. I don't like her, she's mean.

   Paraphrase:

   _____

   _____

   _____

3. How would you start a discussion about what the kids did over the weekend?

   Question:

   What kinds of things did Jordan do with you this weekend?

4. Write a question that starts a discussion about friendships.

   Question:

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. Write how you would interpret your child's body language.

   Example: Child is fidgeting.

   Larry, you seem uncomfortable at the doctor's office.

6. Write how you would interpret your child's body language if they were crying and curled into the fetal position.

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. Mom, I don't want to go to school.

   Paraphrase:

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. How would you go about setting the stage to ask your child about their day?

   Response:

   _____

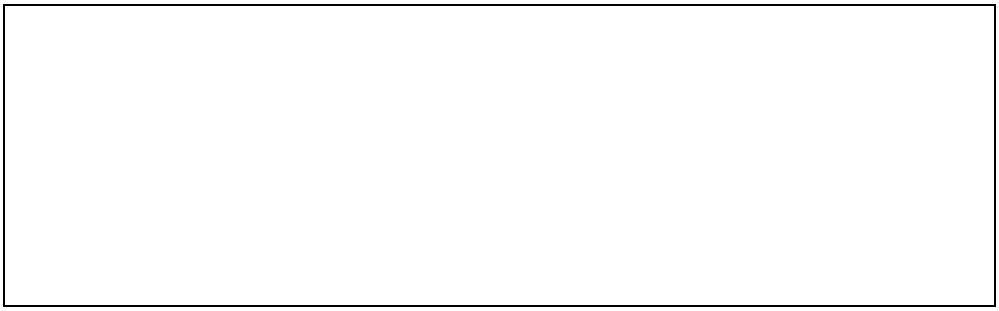
   _____

   _____

Homework Activity #1

To My Child:

- ❑ I want to tell you:
    - o I love you
    - o Miss you
    - o Am happy you are my child/parent
    - o Was thinking of you
    - o Want to spend more time with you
    - o Other_____
- ❑ I want to talk
- ❑ Drawing



- ❑ Personal Message

_____

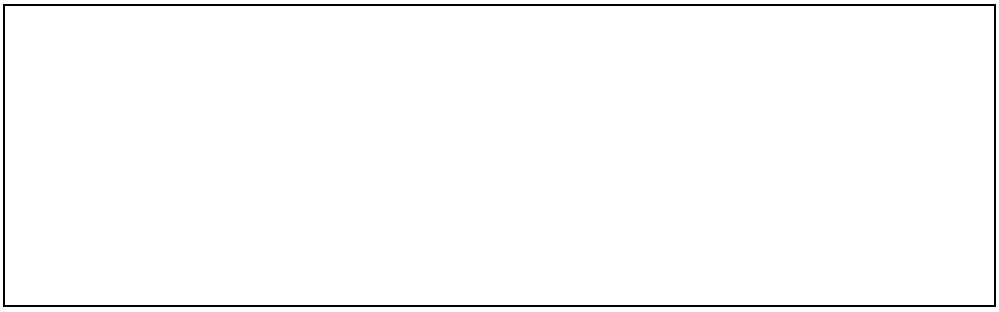
_____

_____

_____

To My Parent:

- ❑ I want to tell you:
    - o I love you
    - o Miss you
    - o Am happy you are my child/parent
    - o Was thinking of you
    - o Want to spend more time with you
    - o Other_____
- ❑ I want to talk
- ❑ Drawing



- ❑ Personal Message

_____

_____

_____

_____

Brainstorming Rituals and Routines

Rituals and Routines	

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Creating Proximity When Apart

Ideas!	

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Space to try out Proximity Idea!

Ideas for Extra-Curricular Activities	

Notes:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

B	**I**	**N**	**G**	**O**
Have a 10 min cuddle	Do an activity together	Paraphrase your child's feelings in the car	Hug	Tell your child you love them
Talk in the car	Ask your child if they have any questions about the divorce?	Take a "me" break	Have a family dinner	Write a note for your child's lunch
Hug	Paraphrase	Free Space	Pay attention to your child's nonverbals	Play a game together
Have a family dinner	Tell Your child you love them	Ask an open question	Give your child your undivided attention for 10min	Create a new family tradition
Pay attention to your child's nonverbals	Start a conversation with an open question	Make dinner together	Hug	Leave space for your child to communicate

Resource List

Information for Parents

- Resources for supporting families through divorce or separation - www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/fcy-fea/index.html
- Parenting after Separation Manual – www. albertacourts.ca/resolution-and-court-administration-serv/family-justice-services/educational-services
- *Putting Children First: Proven Parenting Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce* – By JoAnne Pedro-Carroll
- *Hold Onto Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* – By Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate

Books for use with Children

- *Divorce Is Not the End of the World: Zoe's and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids* – By Zoe and Evan Stern
- *Two Homes* - By Claire Masurel
- *I don't want to talk about it* – By Jeanie Franz Ransom

Counselling Resources

- Psychologists' Association of Alberta –Psychologist referral Service
  780-428-8255
- The Family Centre
  780-424-6103
- YWCA
  780-423-9922 ext 222
  http://www.ywcaofedmonton.org/
- Catholic Social Services – 780-420-1970

Support Groups

For Children:

- Parachute Group –Strathcona County
  780-464-4044
  http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/family-and-community-services/programs-and-services/groups/
- Rainbows –Edmonton Area
  780-448-1180
  www.starfishfamilyresources.org/rainbows

For Adults:

- Prism – Strathcona County
  780-464-4044
  http://www.strathcona.ca/departments/family-and-community-services/programs-and-services/groups/

Appendix E

Workshop Evaluation

Please circle one response for each question.					
I found the workshop provided skills to improve my relationship with my child.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The facilitator was respectful and knowledgeable.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The workshop provided suggestions of how to talk about divorce with my child.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Using the homework, I have been able to put concepts learned into practice.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The length of the workshop was adequate.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The handouts and resources were relevant and useful.	Strong Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

One thing I learned/liked from the workshop:

_____

_____

_____

One thing I would change to improve the workshop:

_____

_____

_____

Additional Comments and Feedback:

_____

_____

_____