

*The Collaborative Divorce Project:
Helping Parents Co-parent when
Young Children Are Involved*

Marsha Kline Pruett, Ph.D., M.S.L.

*Young Children in Divorcing
Families*

U.S. statistics suggest ...over half of children who experience divorce do so by age 6

75% of these children are under age 3

Majority of single parents will remarry, with divorce rates higher among second marriages

Pilot Study Findings

Simpler, Shorter, Less Expensive

Family focus, with emphasis on varying needs

Collaborative/cooperative process that reduces adversarial nature of divorce. "Diminished capacity to parent" evolves in adversarial context.

Pilot Study Findings

Involve young children in the process. Explain divorce and the people involved, and listen to what they are trying to say.

Connect parents' language and goals to lawyers' and judges'.

Pilot Study Findings

Give information that makes divorce understandable and helps parents set realistic expectations

Specialized training for judges, attorneys, and MH staff

Intervention

Co-Parenting Counsel and Case Management

Divorce Orientation

Parenting Education Groups

- Male and female (co-led)
- Two mandatory sessions

Intervention

Feedback and Planning Session

Therapeutic Resolution Intervention

4 intensive education sessions

- Communication and Cooperation
- Minimizing Conflict
- Gatekeeping - Power and Control
- Positive Parenting

Intervention

Therapeutic Mediation

Status/Settlement Conference
– Meetings with Attorneys

Follow-up

Sample Characteristics

Baseline = 161 families

Follow-up = 142 families

Parents: Relationship avg. 8 years

Children: 58% boys and 42% girls

7%	<1 year	Infants
19%	1-2 years	Toddlers
40%	3-4 years	Preschoolers
34%	5-6 years	K-1st

Sample Characteristics

Parents:

Mothers' avg. Age = 31 years

Fathers' avg. Age = 33 years

- 86% Caucasian
- 4 % Latino
- 3% African Americans

Sample Characteristics

Parents:

Average Educational Achievements:

One Year College or Specialized Training

Household Incomes:

Fathers' Mean Income: \$25,001-50,000

Mothers' Mean Income: \$18,001-25,000

Overnights and Young Children



Rise of Attachment Theory in Family Law

Extent to which parent provides secure base from which child interacts with rest of world

Who child turns to for support and nurturance in times of danger or stress

Goldstein, Freud, and Solnit (1973; 1996)

- Emphasize relationship and location continuity
- Primary caretaker has ultimate decision making authority

Spokane County Bar Ass. (1996)

- Caution: no overnights if child < 3 years

Theory and Research: Two Camps

Kelly and Lamb (2000) and Warshak (2000)

- Infants develop multiple, hierarchical attachments
- Infants attach to both parents around 6-7 months
- Kinds of interaction more important than amount

*Kelly and Lamb, and Warshak (2000):
Conclusions*

- Overnights benefit children, strengthen attachments
- Younger children need more transitions, briefer time with secondary parent
caution re: child temperament

Solomon, Biringen and colleagues (1999; 2001)

- No differences in attachment classification for toddlers
- Infants of divorced families more disorganized/unclassifiable to M & F than infants in married families
- Disorganization from parents' lack of communication and sensitivity around transitions by alternate caregiver
- 2 ½ year old follow-up: children with overnights had greater sensitivity to separations and reunions

Their Conclusions:

- more transitions not better
- daytime separations easier than overnights
- attachment occurs even under conditions of minimal contact
- overnights do not have positive effect on infant-father attachment, related to disorganized attachment esp. under high conflict conditions
- safety net insufficient for most children, therefore wait until 3 years of age

Where The Experts Agree/Overlap

- Value of attachment theory
- Children develop multiple attachments and secure attachment is related to positive adjustment/functioning
- Mother-child and father-child attachments are independent and both are important
- Separations are not inherently harmful, and early research is not directly applicable

Where They Diverge

Weight assigned to...

- Hierarchical attachments vs. primary attachment
- Child's preference for mother
- Importance of two central parents vs. stability

Variables in Current Presentation

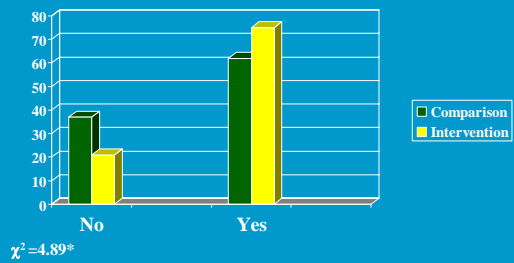
Independent Variables

- Demographics
- Parent-child Relationship
- Parental Conflict
- Overnights? (Y/N)
- Schedule Consistency
- Number of Caregivers

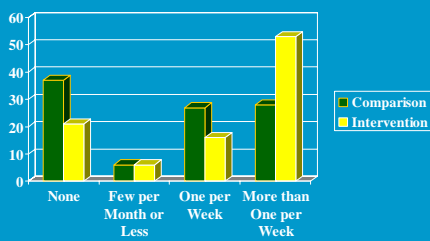
Dependent Variables

- Achenbach subscales for problem behaviors (Parent and teacher ratings)
- Vineland Adaptive Skills

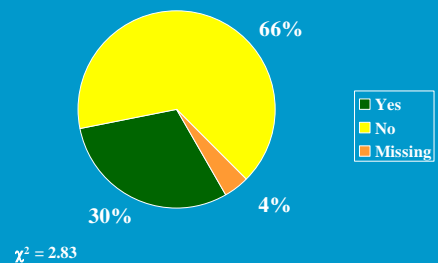
Are There Overnights?



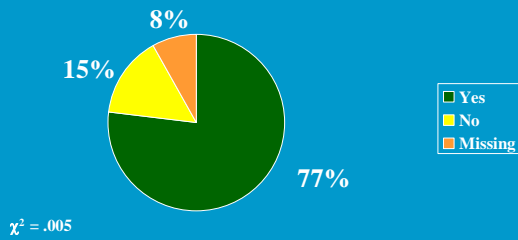
Number of Overnights



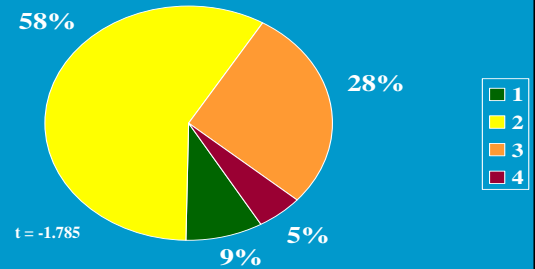
Overnights During the Week?



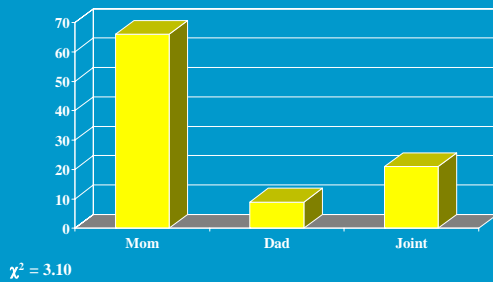
Schedule Consistent Each Week?



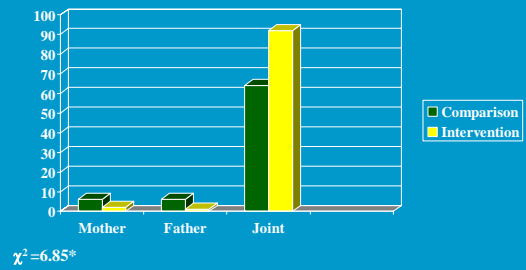
Number of Caretakers Each Week



Primary Residence of the Child



Legal Custody



Family Variables and Child Outcomes

Mothers and Fathers report:

- When Neg. P-C relationships, children exhibited attention, social, and externalizing problems

Mothers also reported:

- When Neg. P-C relationships, children exhibited thought, sleep, and internalizing problems

Note: results reflect correlations

Family Variables and Child Outcomes

When parents reported more conflict:

- Mothers reported sleep problems and somatic complaints
- Fathers reported internalizing and destructive behaviors

Note: results reflect correlations

How are Overnights, Caretakers & Consistent Schedules Related to Child Outcomes? (1 1/2 year follow-up)

	Are there overnights?	Number of caregivers per week	Schedule Consistency
Sleep problems		$r = .43^{**}$	
Anxiety & Depression		$r = .20^*$	$r = -.22^*$ $r = -.23^*$
Social problems	$r = -.24^*$ $r = -.32^*$	$r = -.25^*$	$r = -.28^*$ $r = -.30^*$
Attention problems	$r = -.25^*$	$r = -.33^*$	
Thought problems	$r = -.28^*$		

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; Black = Mom's report, Blue = Dad's report

Do Overnights, More Caregivers, & Schedule Consistency Matter Above and Beyond Other Important Family Dynamics?

	Anxiety & Depression	Social problems	Attention problems
Step 1: Age & Gender	.01	.02	.02
Step 2: Negative changes in parent-child relationship & Parental conflict	.25**	.20**	.27**
Step 3: Overnights, Number of caretakers, Schedule consistency	.10** .10*	.13* .20**	.13*

Note: Numbers reflect R² change in hierarchical regression; Data based on mothers' report, only final step shown

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Results for all Children Over Time

Overnights and overnights during the week are not related to child outcomes.

Young children with consistent schedules have fewer internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

Does Gender Matter for Overnights?

When there are overnights, girls show fewer attention, withdrawal, and social problems.

Boys show more sleep problems and poorer communication skills.

Does Gender Matter for Number of Caregivers?

More caregivers: boys show more internalizing symptoms

Girls show fewer thought problems and internalizing symptoms.

Does Gender Matter for Schedule Consistency?

Consistent schedules:
Boys fewer externalizing problems

Does Age Matter for Overnights?

- Younger children (0-3) with overnights did not show any symptoms (*Mom's Report*)
- Older children (4-6) with overnights had fewer internalizing and externalizing symptoms (*Mom's Report*)
 - anxious/depressed, withdrawn, somatic, aggressive/ destructive, attention, thought

Does Age Matter for Overnights During the Week?

- *Younger children (<3)...*
Were more anxious/depressed and had more somatic problems (*Dad's report*)
- *Older children (>3)...*
Had fewer delinquent problems (*Dad's report*)

Does Age Matter for Number of Caregivers?

Moms' Report:

- *Age 0-3:* More caregivers - more internalizing problems and (almost significant) externalizing problems
anxious/depressed
- *Age 4-6:* More caregivers - no significant symptoms

Dad's Report:

- *Age 0-3:* with more caregivers: fewer externalizing symptoms

Does Age Matter for Schedule Consistency?

Age 4-6: Consistent schedules - fewer thought problems (*Mom's and Dad's Report*)

Overnights Summary...Thus Far

- Children with overnights: fewer social and attention problems, but more sleep disturbances and depression/anxiety
- Children with inconsistent schedules: internalizing symptoms
- Girls benefit from overnights and multiple caregivers, boys do not. Boys also have more problems with inconsistent schedules.
- Preschool and older children benefit from overnights and multiple caregivers; lack of findings for infants and toddlers.



Getting More Sophisticated: HLM Follow-up

- No differences in 0-3 year olds (M)
Children with overnights during week had higher anxiety/depression (F)
- 3-6 years children with overnights had lower somatic (M), withdrawal (F), and social (F, trend) problem scores
- 3-6 years children with inconsistent schedules had higher aggression (M) and withdrawal (F)

Getting More Sophisticated: HLM Follow-up

All ages combined:

- Children with inconsistent schedules had higher anxiety and depression (M), and withdrawal (M &F)

Trends Across Age Groups

Even where the data do not reach significance, a repeating trend across both parents' reports and children 3+ is for children without overnights and those with inconsistent schedules to look worse

At all ages, inconsistent schedules are implicated in a variety of children's symptoms

Another Interesting Wrinkle

The BSI positive symptom distress index was given at Times 1 and 3 to both parents.

No findings for fathers, but mothers reported:
Less distress if there were no overnights at all or during the week for children 0-3 years

SO, when thinking policy...

Children 0-3 show few symptoms overall; anxiety/dep during week noted by fathers
(Are they responding to mothers?)

Mothers of youngest children are distressed with overnights during week
(Is it worth holding kids back from overnights for this?)

Other Intervention Effects

- Increased parental cooperation and father involvement, reduced conflict, less use of intensive court services
- Intervention most helpful to parents with higher symptomatology
- Overnights and positive gatekeeping facilitated by intervention
- Intervention children had fewer attention and thought problems in school by teacher report

Legal Outcomes

According to CDP counselors and Family Services records

- **Intervention group families** made greater use of family services for mediations and parenting plan development
- **Comparison group families** were more likely to:
 - receive mandated or advised additional services
 - undergo a child custody evaluation
 - require one or more special masters' sessions

Definition of Gatekeeping

- *The support or barriers mothers create for fathers' relationships with their children*
- (Allen & Hawkins, 1999)
- Recognizes mothers' typical control over fathers' access to the children in divorce
- Potential reasons: to protect the children; mothers' anger at the fathers

Theory of Gatekeeping in Divorce

- There are two important constructs:
 - past and present
- Moms pay Dads back for their support or lack of it from the marriage/relationship by keeping the "gate" open or closed

Paternal Construct

alpha=.82

My spouse/partner's support of me as a parent is important in my ongoing relationship with my child

When my former spouse/partner is supportive, it helps me to parent more effectively

Maternal Construct

alpha=.72

It is part of my job as a parent to positively influence my child's relationship with his/her other parent

It is my job to help my spouse be the best parent he can be to our child

In order to best take care of my child, it is important for me to positively influence my child's relationship with my spouse/partner

Testing the Theory: Past and Gatekeeping

- Past is related to mothers' and fathers' gatekeeping at T1 and T3
- Fathers who felt supported in past (T1 and T3) report themselves as more cooperative at T3
- Mothers who felt supported in past (T1 and T3) report themselves as more cooperative at T3
- Mothers who felt supported in past (T3) report themselves as more cooperative and less conflictual, their husbands as more involved fathers, and their relationships with their children as changing more negatively

Gatekeeping and Outcomes

- According to both moms and dads:
Positive gatekeeping was linked with higher levels of cooperation and shared childrearing, lower parental conflict and hostility, and greater father involvement.

Intervention Effects

Intervention vs. Control:

- 1) Iv mothers more likely to endorse positive gatekeeping than controls
- 2) Iv fathers more likely to endorse positive gatekeeping than controls
- 3) Iv mothers 4x more likely to mention ways they hindered access