

Child Focused and Inclusive Practice with Families Post Divorce



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Characteristics of High Conflict Families

- High rates of litigation and re-litigation;
- High degrees of anger and distrust;
- Intermittent verbal and/or physical aggression;
- Difficulty focussing on the needs of their children and the fact that their children's needs are separate from their own; and
- Chronic difficulty co-parenting and communicating about the children after separation.



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Goals of Mums and Dads Forever Programme

- Reduce levels of litigation for parents.
- Reduce parental conflict and disputes over parenting.
- Promote greater compliance with Parenting Orders or the ability to work together to build new Orders that suit the family's needs.
- Provide alternatives to litigation over contact.
- Provide alternatives to current penalties for breach of Contact Orders.
- Reduce levels of stress for children in divorce proceedings



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



KPI's for programme

Children's relationships with contact parents will be re-established or maintained.

Children's voices will be heard and respected through a greater recognition of their needs and increased parental abilities to appropriately address them.

Parents will have a greater understanding of their children's needs and interests.

Children will have an improved relationship with both parents.



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Adult Group Programme

- Focussing on the Children
- Knowing Self
- Understanding our own grief and accepting Change
- Understanding the Effects of grief on Children
- Communication
- Managing Disputes and High Emotions
- Problem Solving
- The Future



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Adult Group Evaluation

- ECU study 2005
- Qualitative design
- 2004 MDF participants pre- and post-program questionnaires
- Designed and existing psychometric measures
- 113 respondents: 54 male, 59 female
 - Age range 22 to 60 years, mean age 34
 - Mean time since separation 2 years
 - Sample represented 200+ children 0 - 25

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Results

- Increased knowledge of separation issues
- Reduction in inter-parental conflict
- Fewer disputes over contact and changeover arrangements
- Improvement in quality of co-parenting relationship
- **No change in participants' attitudes towards former partners**



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Results

- Participants considered the program to be helpful and useful.
- This type of post-separation parenting education can and does make a difference for parents. **The program works!**



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Worden's Grief Model

- Accepting the loss
- Expressing the pain
- Adjusting to living with the loss
- Creating new meaning



– Worden, JW. (2003). *Grief counselling and grief therapy : a handbook for the mental health practitioner*. Hove, East Sussex : Brunner-Routledge.

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Wallerstein's Research

- Resolving self-blame and understanding what factors cause family division
- Overcoming a sense of loss
- Acknowledging the permanence of the separation
- Alleviating anger
- Resuming developmental agendas at school and with friends
- Developing hope and confidence

– Wallerstein, JS. & Blakeslee, S. (1996). *Second chances: men, women, and children a decade after divorce*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin.



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Parental Involvement

- Attendance at an initial intake session
- Participating in a parent and child group orientation session
- Children have take home activity sheets which they can share with parents if they wish
- Attendance for a short period at the end of the last session when children receive their certificates of attendance and have a celebratory afternoon tea
- Group feedback and discussion session for parents
- Individual feedback session with parent(s) and child following the group, or with parent(s) without children present.



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Childrens' Group Outline

- Session 1 - Change and Stress
- Session 2 – Why Change Happens
- Session 3 – Grief and sadness
- Session 4 – More Feelings - anger
- Session 5 – Coping stations
- Session 6 – Stepping into the Future



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Workshop Questions for Childrens' Group

- What factors are important to consider in running a childrens' group in relation to separation?
- What activities/issues could be included in a childrens' group?
- What pre and post group factors might be important to evaluate?
- Is parental involvement important ? Why, why not?

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Childrens' Group Evaluation

- 13 children in telephone interviews
- 9 questions relating to their experiences of the group program
- Opportunity to be anonymous and to speak more freely
- Overall positive responses to the group process

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Childrens' responses

- *"I really liked it a lot I think. I met new friends there, they were cool. That was cool stuff too. And we all went away just before and that was cool too. That was with our new friends."* (Boy, 7 years old)
- *"It helped a lot I think. I think that counselling is a good thing. It gave me a chance to talk to talk about my problems and to talk about how I felt which is important."* (Girl, 10 years old)

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



More From the Children

- *"I didn't know anyone except for my brother. We got to sit with a pillow in a group, so it was good to have my brother to sit with then."* (Girl, 11 years old)
- *"It was good that sometimes the drawing made more sense because I didn't know how to say that, the way that I was feeling. So we talked about the drawing."* (Girl, 10 years old)

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



And more...

- *"It was more focused on you as a person and the most helpful. The best part. You got to talk about yourself and it really helped."* (Boy, 14 years old)
- *"It is great that it is confidential as well. There are things that I could say to the counsellor that I wouldn't say to anyone else and they don't judge you either."* (Girl, 14 years old)

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



And...

- *"I like that I know how I feel now. Like I feel funny sometimes and I can say to myself that I know that I am getting scared or worried. So it's good that I can know what my feelings are."* (Girl, 10 years old)

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



A Mediation Case Study

- ‘Child focused’ and ‘child inclusive’ practice
- Terminology used in describing these practices
- Who’s the client?



Child Inclusive Mediation Practice in Australia

- Intake with parents where child inclusive work is introduced
- With parental approval the child is interviewed separately by a counsellor
- Next mediation session the child counsellor provides feedback to parents
- Mediation continues with/without child counsellor



Child Mediation Practice

- So, while the process is described as ‘child inclusive’, children themselves seldom (if ever) meet face-to-face with their parents in the same room



Case Study

- Mother: Simone*
- Father: Robert
 - Both are highly qualified, articulate and have careers
- Child: Shaun, aged 10
 - Very articulate and appears highly intelligent

* (Names of family members have been changed to preserve confidentiality)

Issues

- Shaun refused to visit Robert for weekends
- Conflict about what Shaun would do during his time with his father
- Shaun wanted prior information about activities and for Robert to “tell me the truth”
- Robert wanted to discuss “behaviour management”

Mediation

- Parents agreed to have Shaun interviewed
- Child counsellor (Sally) saw Shaun
- Shaun didn’t want Sally to speak for him; “Dad won’t believe it’s what I want”
- Shaun described alternatives:
 - he work in mediation with his parents using a one-way mirror
 - phone mediation
 - shuttle mediation

Questions

- What factors would you take into account when planning how to proceed?
- What risks and benefits would you consider in deciding how to work with this family?



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Our Approach

- Considered the issues and planned our approach together
- Checked with parents about how we might proceed
- Invited Shaun to talk with us again and undertook preparation
- Mediation: all together, to address Shaun's list of concerns

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Outcome (So Far)

- Small agreements reached during the joint session
- Decision to meet with Shaun and Robert only (Shaun's concerns re weekend contact)
- Further work with Robert and Simone (relationship issues)

ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



- Your reactions to this approach?



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



What Have We Learned?

- Comprehensive assessment- this isn't for every family
- It can be important for children to hear from their parents about what's happening as this can clarify situation for them
- Close focus on children's issues, not their parents'
- Clarify differences between children's understandings and those of their parents



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Rewards of Working Like This

- Parents' greater understanding of children's needs
- Children's greater understanding of parents' situation
- Improved communication between family members
- Possible attitudinal changes that support closer relationships between members



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA



Conclusion

- Is 'child inclusive practice' *really* inclusive?
 - We think that the use of a narrow term can work to *exclude* children; they're seen as different from adults
- We'd like to find a better term for the work we do: 'child involved practice'?
 - 'Family practice'?
 - Something else?



ANGLICARE
CHANGING LIVES WA

