

## Does Divorce Education for Parents Make a Difference?

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## Objectives

- What are the elements of an effective parent education program for divorcing parents?
- What does evaluation tell us about the impact of divorce education programs?
- What additional research needs to be done to learn more about parent education programs for divorcing parents?

## What makes a divorce education program effective:

- Skill based
- Offered over time - in multiple segments
- Build in practice of new skills and review of concepts
- Skilled facilitators
- Provide a sense of common experience
- Are comprehensive

## Parents Forever

An educational program for parents who are divorcing or have never married and are dealing with issues of co-parenting, custody, child support

## Parent Education Legislation

518.157

- Enacted January 1, 1998
- Requires Parent Education courses in all judicial districts
- Imposes minimum standards and length (8 hours as of July 1, 2004)
- Requires attendance when visitation or custody are contested

## Goals of Parents Forever

- Eliminate parent conflict in front of the children
- Keep the children out of parents' issues
- Provide children with access to both parents
- Put the best interests of the children first

## Parents Forever Sessions

- **IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON ADULTS** (2 hours)
- **IMPACT OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN** (4 hours)
- **MONEY ISSUES IN DIVORCE** (2 hours)
- **LEGAL ISSUES AND THE ROLE OF MEDIATION IN DIVORCE** (2 hours)
- **PATHWAYS TO A NEW LIFE** (2 hours)

## Does divorce education for parents make a difference?

## Factors that increase success of divorce education

- Both parents attend and complete class
- Well trained and skilled facilitators
- Parents attend class early in divorce process
- Support from Court and legal community
- Class meets over time and provides depth to help parents learn and practice new skills

## What does evaluation tell us about the effectiveness of these programs?

- Conflict reduction
- Length of the program
- Change of parenting behaviors
- Return to court rates/Re-litigation

## What we know about Parents Forever



## Method

Sample:

378 parents who had completed *Parents Forever* 6 months earlier

369 parents who had completed the classes 12 months earlier

Independent t-tests revealed more parents in the 12-month pool had shared legal custody of their children. There were no other differences.

## Procedure

- Random sample of these parents selected for telephone interviews
- 89 telephone interviews were completed
  - 44 parents from the 6-month group
  - 45 parents from the 12-month group
- The telephone interview instrument consisted of twenty-six questions, open-ended and multiple-choice
  - Interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes

## Course Format

- Often parents were not happy about being court mandated
- Class information did not come at the right time to meet their needs.
- Many parents described difficulties in attending the class.

## Course Format

- Parents were overwhelmingly satisfied with the group format of *Parents Forever*.
- There were mixed reactions about the ability of facilitators to lead the class

## Behavior Change

- 38.0% reported they had “gotten better” at managing conflict with the other parent
- 75% reported they had made changes in avoiding conflict with the other parent in front of the children
- 65.8% reported being able to cooperate better with the other parent about the children

## Behavior Change

- 42.5% reported handling their anger with the other parent by talking it out
- 30.3% reported increasing the amount of time the children spend with the other parent

## Behavior Change

Behavior Change (less or not at all)	Frequency	Sample Size
Use children to carry messages	69.0%	29
Quiz children about other parent	79.2%	24
Put down other parent in front of children	87.9%	33

## Behavior Change

Behavior Change	Frequency	Sample Size
Cooperation with other parent	58.4%	78
Communication with kids	51.7%	88
Own emotional well-being	78.7%	88
Children's emotional well-being	58.4%	84

## Implications for parent education for divorcing families

- Class logistics critical for parent satisfaction.
- Support facilitators in managing group dynamics and offering unbiased information.
- Offer additional information about the impact of divorce on children.
- Provide the opportunity to have children participate in the program.

## Unanswered questions about parent education programs for divorcing parents

## Some unanswered questions

- What are the most important content areas to focus on?
- What are the child outcomes when parents complete a divorce education program?
- Do divorce education programs save families and the courts money?
- When there is domestic violence, what is the best way to offer the programs safely?
- How can you get parents to participate in the program early in the divorce process?

## Additional resources to support parents in divorce transition





[www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever](http://www.extension.umn.edu/parentsforever)

[www.parenting.umn.edu](http://www.parenting.umn.edu)

