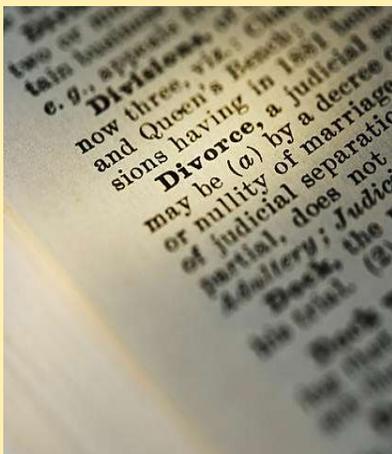


Significance of Divorce Education

- *On average it takes two or more years for children to adjust to their parents' divorce. With love, understanding and keeping in close contact with children, parents can help them grow into well-adjusted and productive adults.*
- *Most significant is the need to minimize the conflict and hostility between parents. This contributes to the child's positive sense of well being and self-worth.*
- *The percentage of children in the U.S. living with two parents increased slightly to 69.1% by the year 2000, and the percentage of children living with just one parent decreased from 27.9% in 1996 to 26.7% in the year 2000 (Moore, Jekielek, and Emig, 2002).*
- Data from the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) indicate that the divorce rate for married women increased sharply between 1970 and 1975, a period when divorce laws were changing. However, subsequent estimates indicate that the divorce rate per 1,000 married women leveled off at about 20 per 1,000 women in the late-1970s and has stayed at about that level through the mid-1990s (Kreider, U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).
- Fewer than 50% of the current generation of children can look forward to living continuously with their natural parents all through their childhood (Dworkin and Karahan, 2003).
- Usually, children of divorced parents are disadvantaged compared to children of married parents in the area of educational attainment. They are also more than twice as likely to have serious social, emotional, or psychological problems as children of intact families-25 percent versus 10 percent (Parke, 2003).
- Births to unmarried women increased steadily during the post-war decades, accelerating in the 1980s, affecting trends in family structure, children's living arrangements, and thus children's behavior and well being (Terry-Humen, et al, 2001).
- Children's adjustment following a divorce has more to do with the quality of the parent-child relationship than with the gender and age of the child; hence discussing the separation and divorce with children will strengthen parents' relationship with them (DeBord, 1997).
- In general, the accumulated research suggests that marital dissolution has the potential to create considerable turmoil in people's lives and divorce-stress-adjustment perspective should be used in understanding the contingencies under which divorce leads to varied outcomes (Amato, 2000).
- In a court-mandated, child-focused class for divorcing parents, the skills taught were effectively learned and maintained over the evaluation period (Arbuthnot and Gordon, 1996).
- Parents who attended a divorce education class (built around the video, Children in the Middle, 1st edition, 2005) had fewer contacts with attorneys, spent less money on the divorce, were more encouraging for their children to love their other parent, and exposed their children to less conflict. These results suggest the importance of mandating parents into classes very early in the divorce process before conflict and litigiousness can interfere with their willingness to communicate and cooperate.
- The findings of evaluations of three multisession, skill-building interventions for divorced parents presented evidence that parenting is a modifiable protective factor and that improving parenting leads to improvements in children's post divorce adjustment (Wolchik, et. al. 2005).
- Researchers Hughes and Kirby (2000) focused on developing support systems and programs for divorcing families. Their findings indicated that mediation and parent education were extremely useful and effective for the families undergoing separation.



U.S. and North Dakota Divorce Rates

- The national divorce rate is 3.6 divorces per 1000 population and national marriage rate is 7.5 marriages per 1,000 population.
- The North Dakota divorce rate is 3.1 divorces per 1000 population and 7 marriages per 1,000 population.
- This translates to approximately 2,000 divorces and 4,480 marriages each year in North Dakota.

Implications / Recommendations for Policy and Programs

- Research clearly demonstrates that family structure matters for children, and the family structure that helps children the most is a family headed by two biological parents in a low-conflict marriage. There is value for children in promoting strong, stable marriages between biological parents.
- Helping parents cope with divorce and support their children through the process clearly benefits families. Enhanced parent-child relationships at the time of divorce can help arbitrate the impact of divorce on children.
- Many studies have found that educational programs can help parents reassure and support their children through the divorce process, therefore evading lasting problems.
- The effects of conflicted divorces and the stresses on kids involved do not go away when the divorce decree is signed and filed in court. Assuring a good parenting plan is in place is the best thing we can offer to North Dakota kids who are caught in the middle.
- Implementing psycho- educational programs which reduce interparental conflict in divorcing families and the negative impact of conflict on children should be the goal of the policy makers. This can be done by reviewing the content of programs currently being delivered (in other states) and evaluating the evidence from well-controlled studies concerning their effectiveness.
- One national survey (Geasler and Blaisure, 1999) concluded that nearly half of all counties in the U.S. now provide some form of education program for divorcing parents. This indicates a rapidly growing interest in providing a promising intervention for families in crisis. By the same token, however, the data indicate that just over half of all counties in the U.S. do not provide such a program.

Conclusion

Educational programming for divorcing parents is no longer a “nice thing to do” for divorcing parents and their children. Research indicates that Divorce Education does make a difference. Divorce Education programs provide an opportunity for professionals to mediate conflict and assist parents in agreeing on a written plan that can be the foundation for children’s well-being. When the focus of the educational effort is on the children, everyone benefits.

The research to date provides support for wider implementation of divorce education to parents in North Dakota. Programs should be designed as a preventative approach and focus on decreasing the risks for children. These programs should not offer specific services or legal advice. Sending everyone involved a message that the children involved are the priority for everyone, and that investing time now will reduce negative outcomes later is central to a quality divorce education program.