

# The Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (SCCAP): Initiative for Dissemination of Evidence-based Treatments for Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health Problems

With additional support from Florida International University and The Children's Trust.



# Workshop

## A.C.T for the Children: Assisting Children Through Transition

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Co-founder of A.C.T.



# Part 1 of 2

# Today's topics

- ▶ Current research on impact of divorce on children
- ▶ Children's risk factors and inner experiences
- ▶ Children's protective factors
- ▶ Quality parenting
- ▶ Evidence-based interventions and parent education: ACT\*-For the Children
- ▶ \*Assisting Children through Transition

# Research overview

## Changes in family life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Divorce rates in the United States are near 50% --highest of any Western nation\*
- Nearly all European countries have increased divorce rates since early 1970s.
- Causes and consequences of divorce are similar across countries

\*Amato, P. R. & James, S. (2010). Divorce in Europe and the United States: Similarities and Differences

Across Nations. *Family Science* 1:2-13.

What's going to happen  
to me?

# Research overview

## Impact of marital disruption on children

### Meta-analysis: Specific risks

- Academic achievement
- Psychological adjustment
- Self concept
- Behavior
- Social competence

# Research overview

Impact of marital disruption on offspring as adults

## Meta-analysis: Specific risks

- Lower socioeconomic status
- Poorer physical health
- Poorer sense of well-being
- Weaker emotional ties to parents, especially fathers
- Higher divorce rate in this generation



# Research overview

## The good news

These outcomes are not inevitable!

Research provides important guidelines for prevention and intervention.

# Children's risk & protective factors

Our work with children and families should be guided by research on

Factors that put children *at risk* for problems

Factors that protect children, promoting *resilience & healthy adjustment*

# Long-term risk factors



# Children's risk factors

## Individual characteristics

- ▶ Difficult temperament
- ▶ Pre-divorce adjustment problems
- ▶ Feelings of guilt, self blame
- ▶ Lack of coping skills, avoidant coping style
- ▶ Child in middle of conflict aligned with one parent against other

# Children's risk factors

## Family characteristics

- ▶ Conflict between parents
- ▶ Poor parent-child relationships
- ▶ Multiple transitions and sources of stress
- ▶ Economic decline
- ▶ Poor quality of parenting
- ▶ Exposure to violence

# Children's risk factors

## Conflict

In every controlled study

### CONFLICT=WORSE ADJUSTMENT

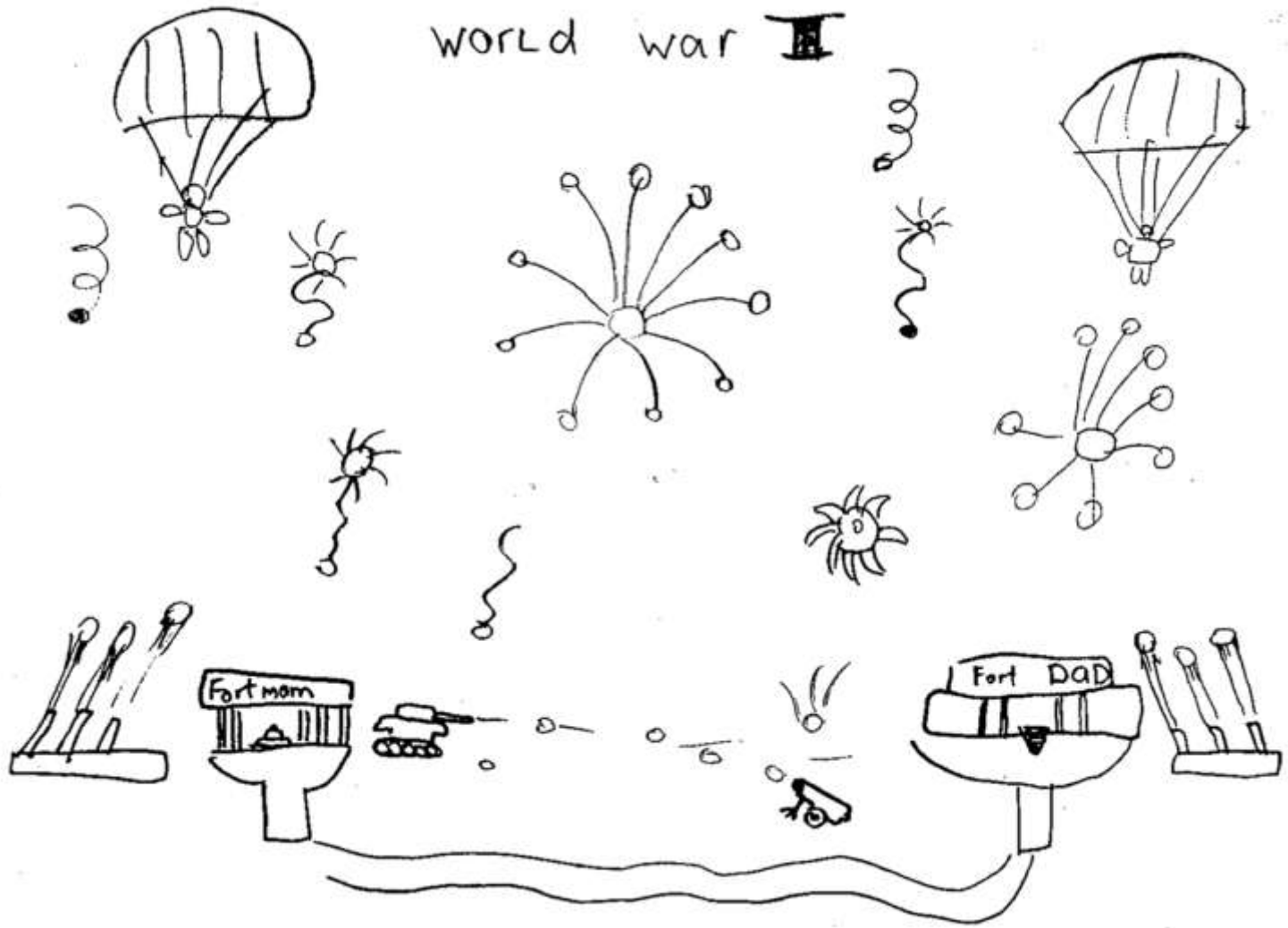
- Yet, conflict is a natural part of separating
- Not all conflict is the same

### WORST FOR CHILDREN

Emotionally & physically:

- Verbal and physical aggression that is frequent, intense, unresolved
- Child-focused conflict – worst of all

World war II



# Children's risk factors

## Impact of conflict on children's physical health

- ▶ New research links children's exposure to parent conflict to more illness (El-Sheikh, 2008)
- ▶ Bio-psycho-social model of wellness shows impact of stress and anxiety on children
- ▶ More frequent headaches, stomach aches (White & Farrell, 2005)
- ▶ Impact on physical growth (Montgomery, 1997)



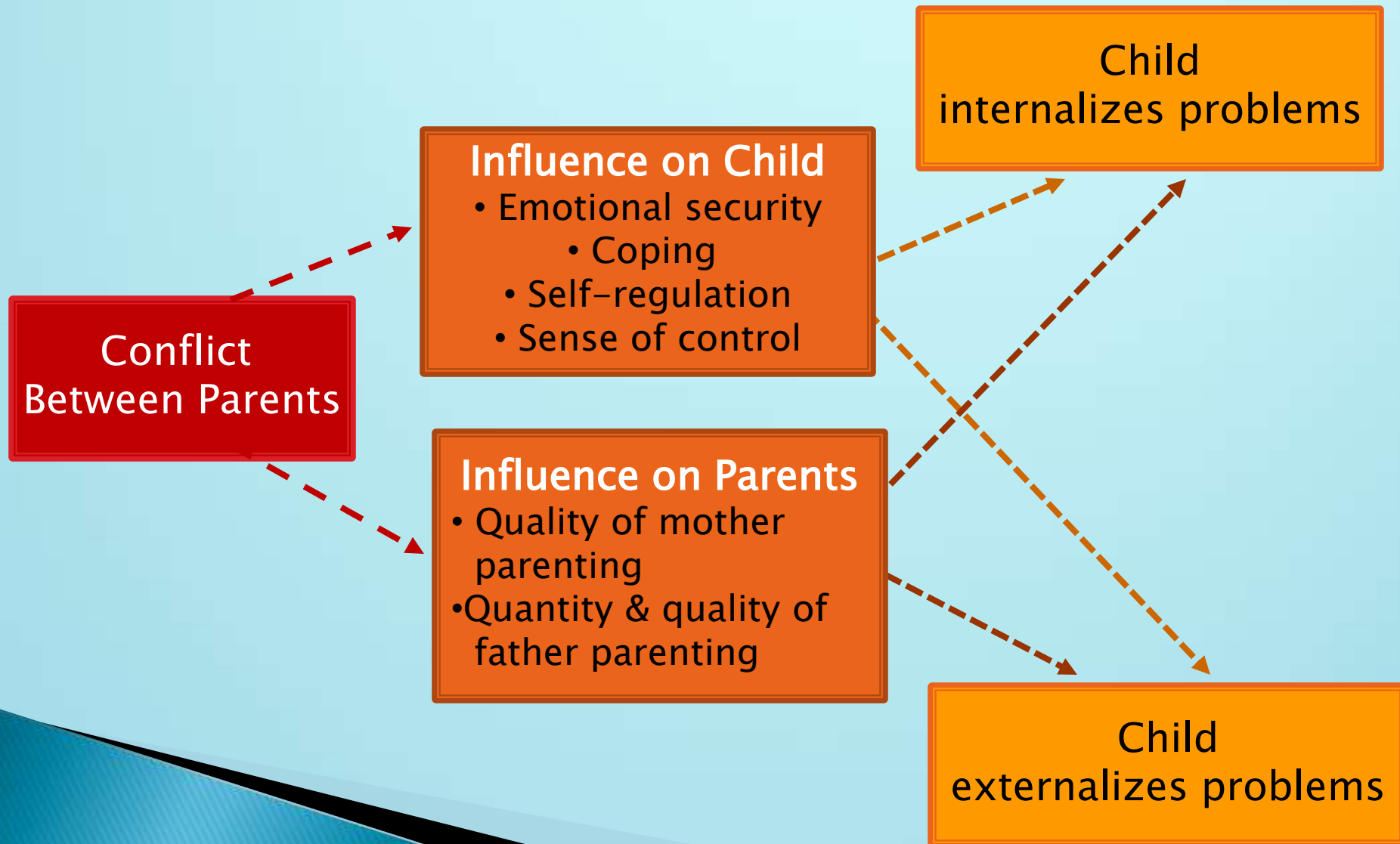
# Children's risk factors

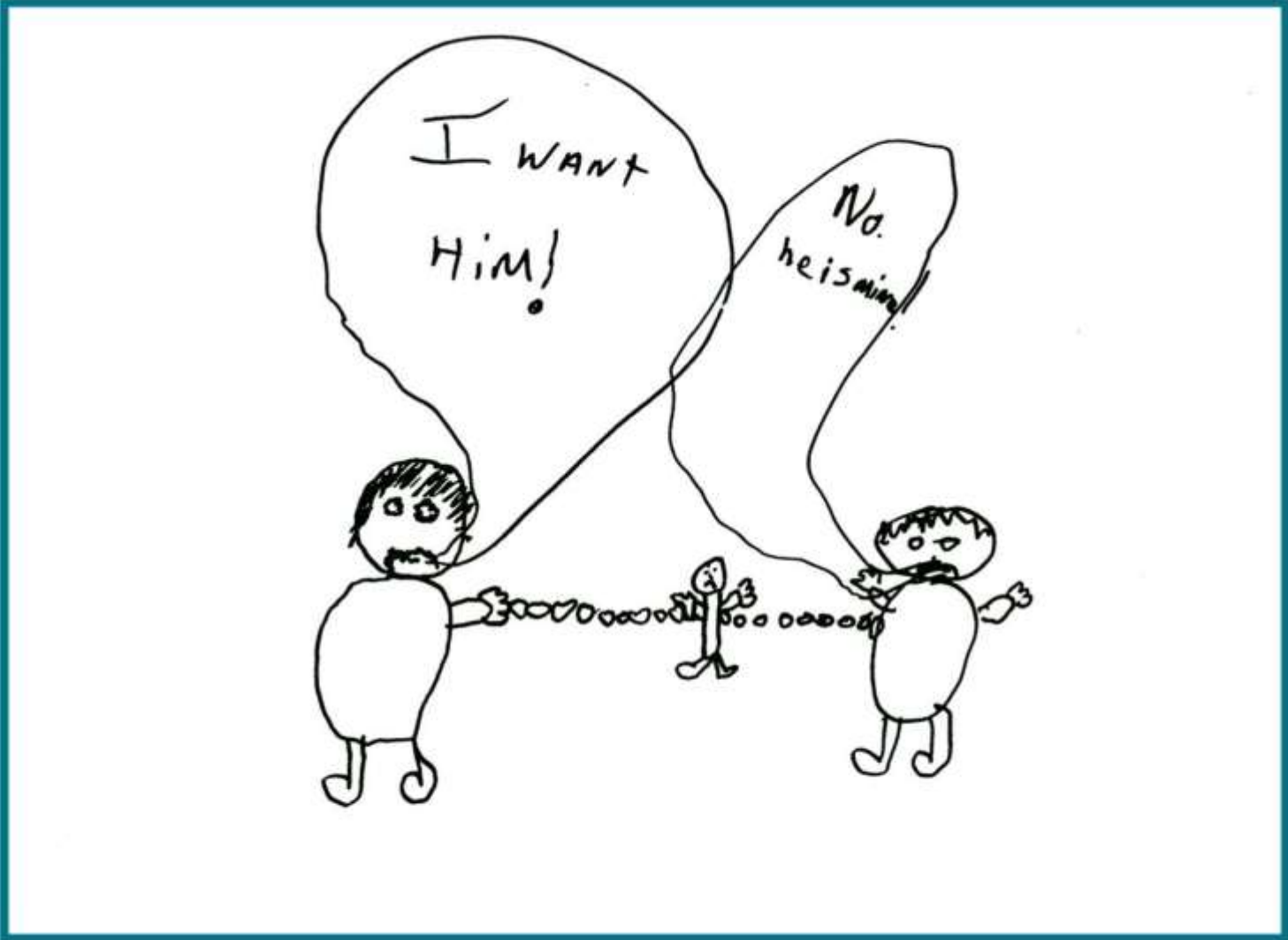
## Conflict

How conflict between parents affects children, directly and indirectly

- ▶ High-conflict divorces linked to children's mental health problems
- ▶ Conflict has negative effect on parenting itself

# How parents' conflict leads to children's mental health problems





# Children's risk factors

Characteristics of parent conflict most associated with children's mental health problems Kelly & Emery, 2003

- ▶ Verbally or physically aggressive
- ▶ Using children to express parents' own anger
- ▶ Asking children to carry hostile messages
- ▶ Belittling other parent
- ▶ Forbidding mention of other parent
- ▶ Putting child in loyalty conflict
- ▶ **HOWEVER**, when parents contain their conflict and do not involve children, effects are minimal

# Children's risk factors

## Conflict between parents: research findings

- ▶ Very high immediately after separation or divorce
- ▶ Decreases but stays high in about 25% of divorces
- ▶ One of the strongest predictors of child problems following divorce – about equal in impact to poor quality of parenting

# Children's risk factors

## Losses

Children may experience multiple losses

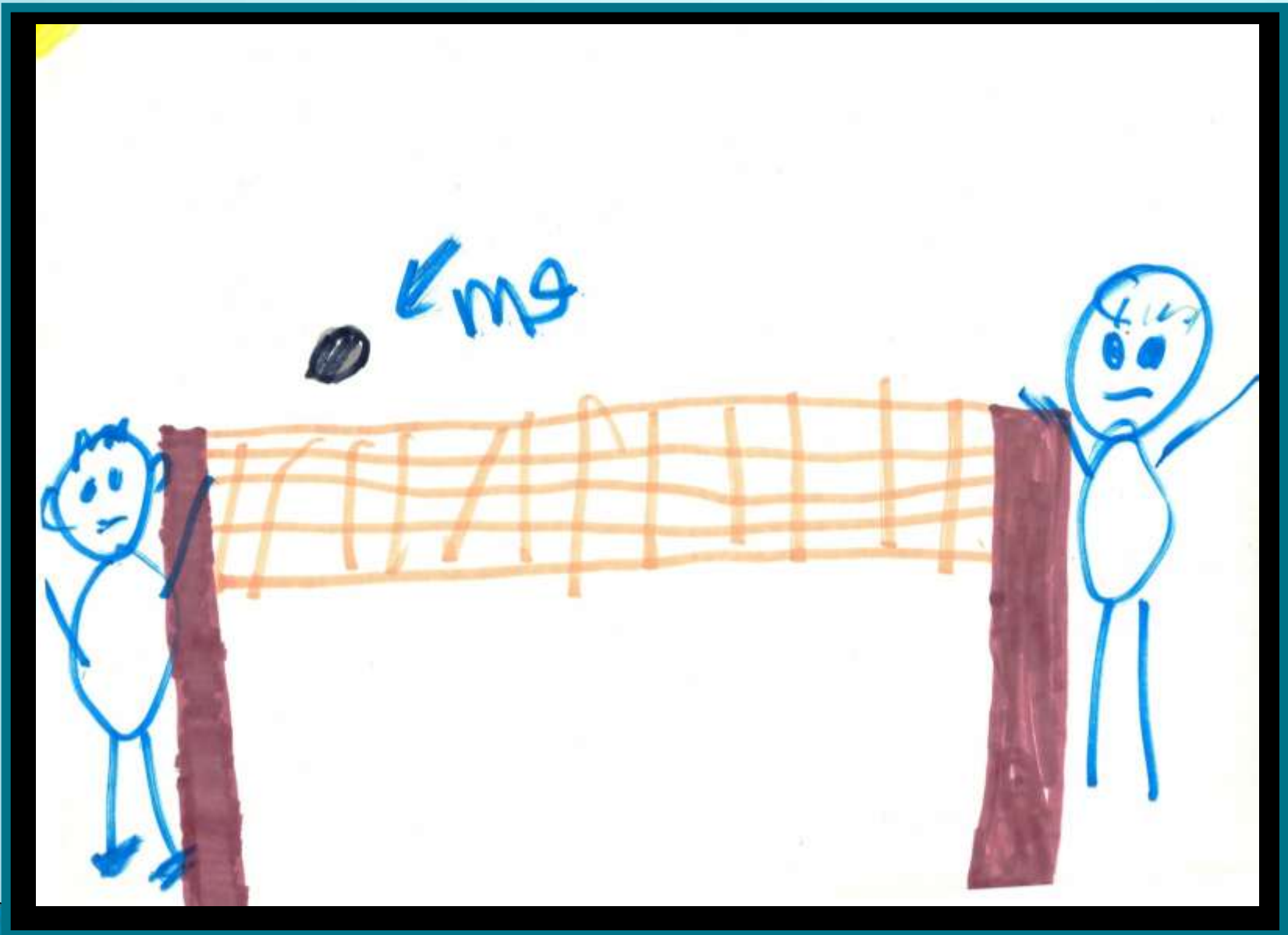
*“Better for them, but not for me”*

- ▶ Life as they knew it – family routines
- ▶ Family relationships
- ▶ Economic
- ▶ Pets
- ▶ Fears of replacement
- ▶ Sense of security

# Children's risk factors

## What children experience

- ▶ When I'm with my Mom, I miss my Dad – 98%
- ▶ When with Dad, I miss Mom – 98%
- ▶ My parents argue a lot – 86%
- ▶ My parents fight about me – 81%
- ▶ I worry that family problems are my fault – 79%
- ▶ Going back and forth between homes – 78%

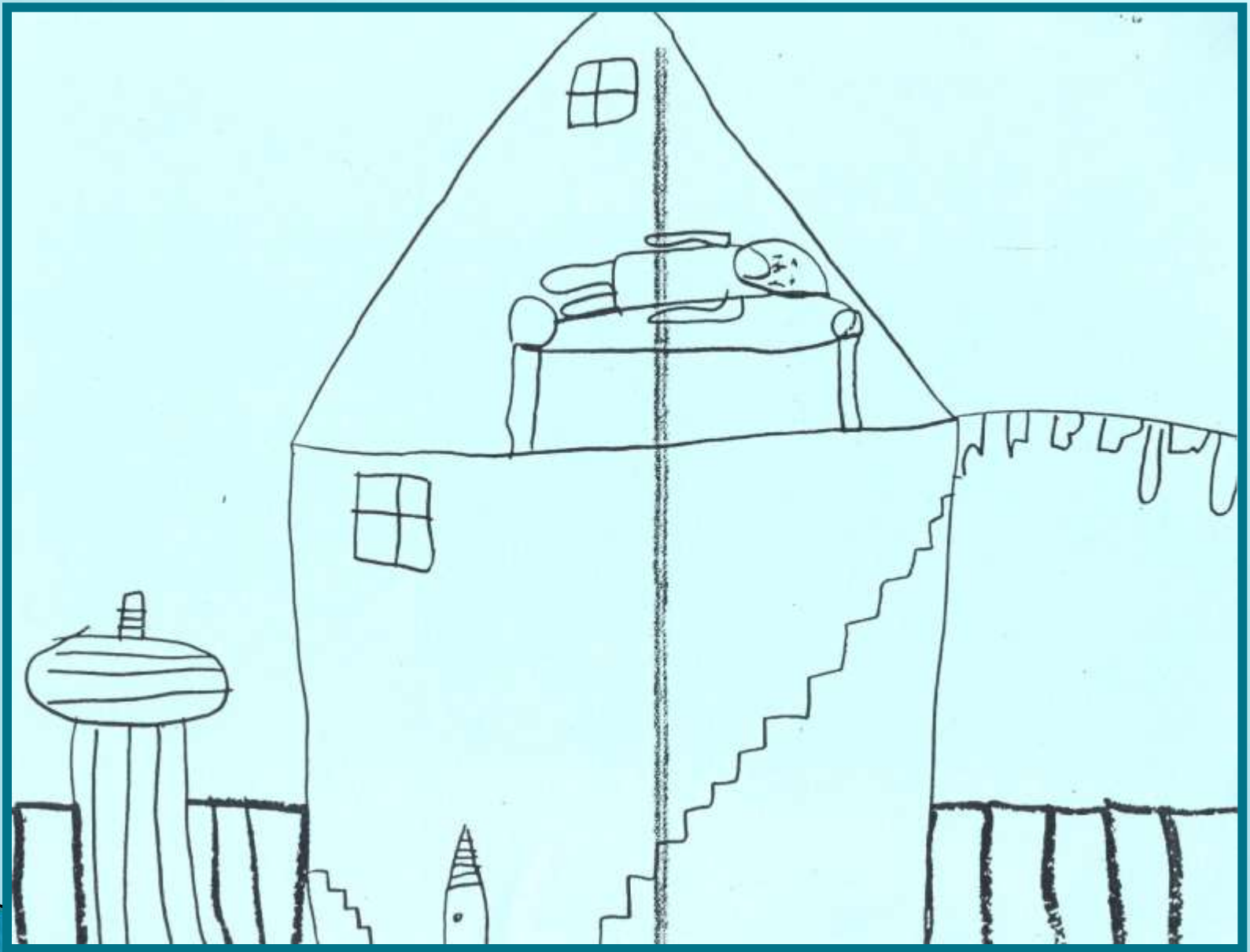




# Children's risk factors

## What children experience

- ▶ I have a hard time in school – 72%
- ▶ I don't get enough time with my Dad (72%)  
Mom (64%)
- ▶ I worry about what kids will think if they know my parents are divorced – 65%
- ▶ I worry about my family – 63%
- ▶ We don't have enough money – 56%
- ▶ Sometimes I feel like I don't have a family – 29%



# Children's risk factors

## Gap between children's stress and parents' awareness

2009 APA Stress Survey

What children experience vs. what parents think they experience	Children say	Parents say
Worry a great deal (ages 8–12)	14%	3%
Worry a great deal (ages 13–17)	28%	
Worry about doing well in school (ages 8–17)	44%	34%
Worry about getting into good college and deciding what to do after high school (ages 13–17)	29%	5%
Worry about family finances	30%	18%
Experienced difficulty sleeping in past months	45%	13%
Experienced headaches	36%	13%

# Children's risk factors

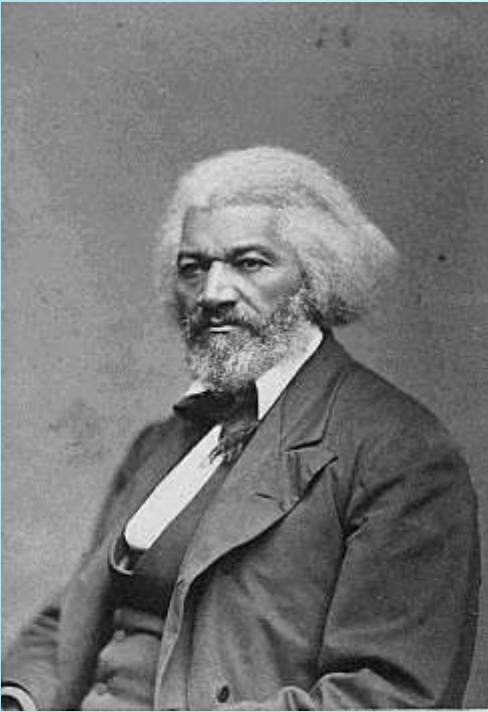
Why children seldom express what they feel

- ▶ May not have the “emotional vocabulary” to express feelings
- ▶ May want to protect parent from hurt or more stress
- ▶ Fear of creating more conflict
- ▶ Growing independence, autonomy
- ▶ Emotionally disengaged
- ▶ Lack of trust
- ▶ Fear of abandonment

Pedro-Carroll, 2010

# Children's Protective Factors





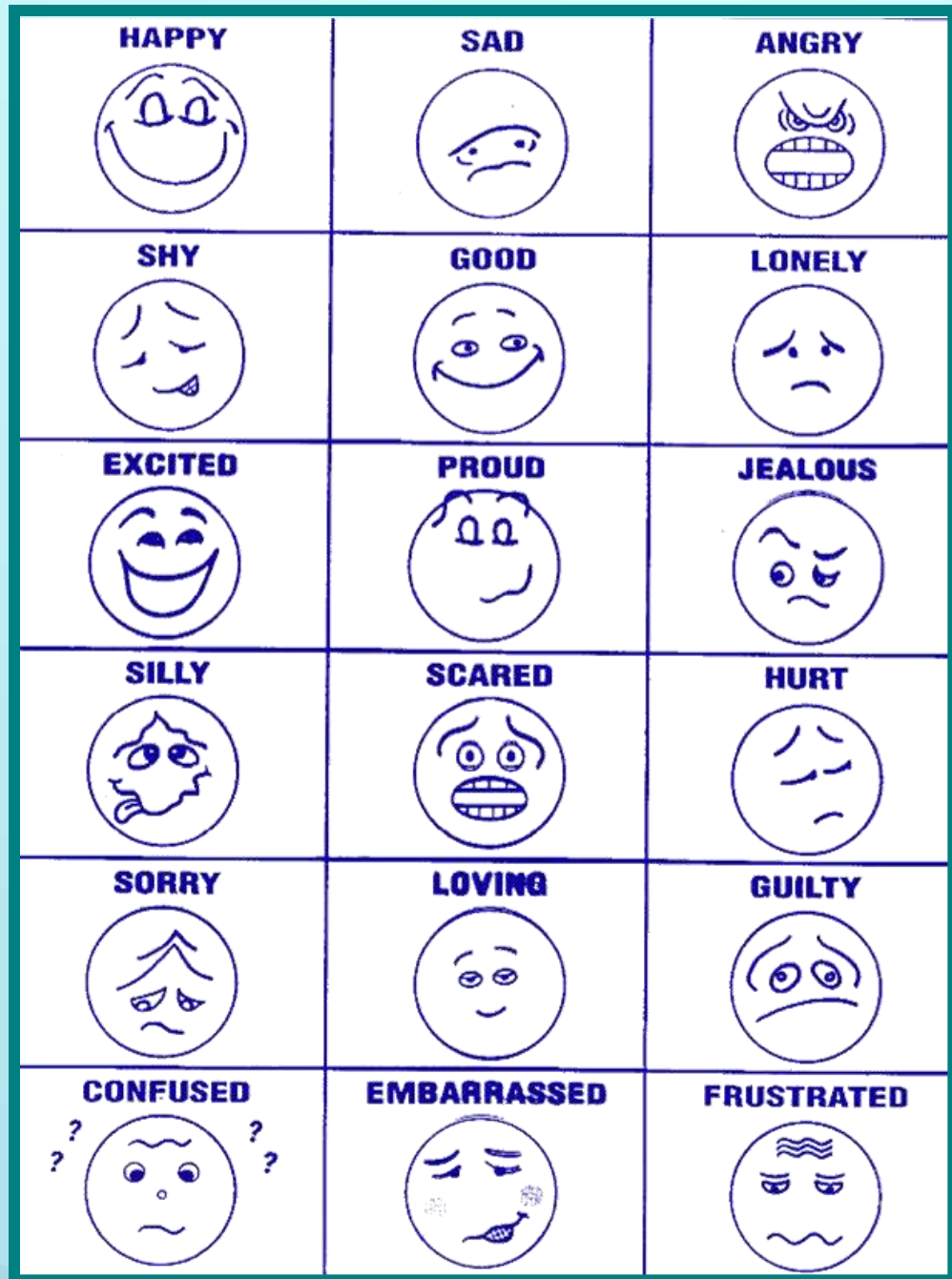
*“It is easier to build strong children  
than to repair broken men.”*

Frederick Douglass

# Children's protective factors

## Individual skills

Developing a vocabulary to identify and describe emotions





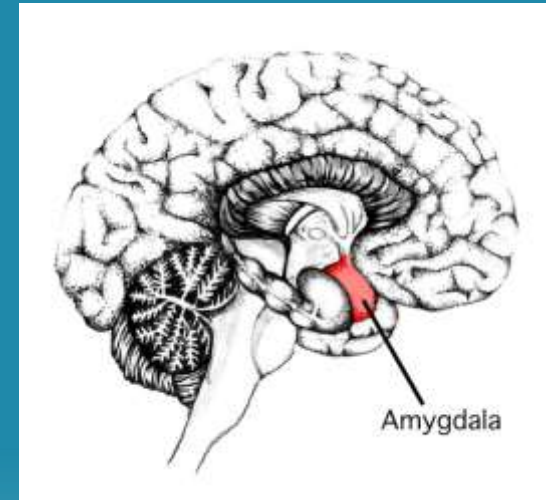
# Children's protective factors

## Labeling emotions

### Recent neuroscience research on “affect labeling”

Impact of naming emotions:

- ▶ fMRI shows calming response in amygdala
- ▶ Moves activity prefrontal cortex
- ▶ Increase in prefrontal cortex and decrease in amygdala slows and soothes emotional response
- ▶ Helps children develop neural pathways for managing strong emotion, problem solving, rational thinking and judgment





# Children's protective factors

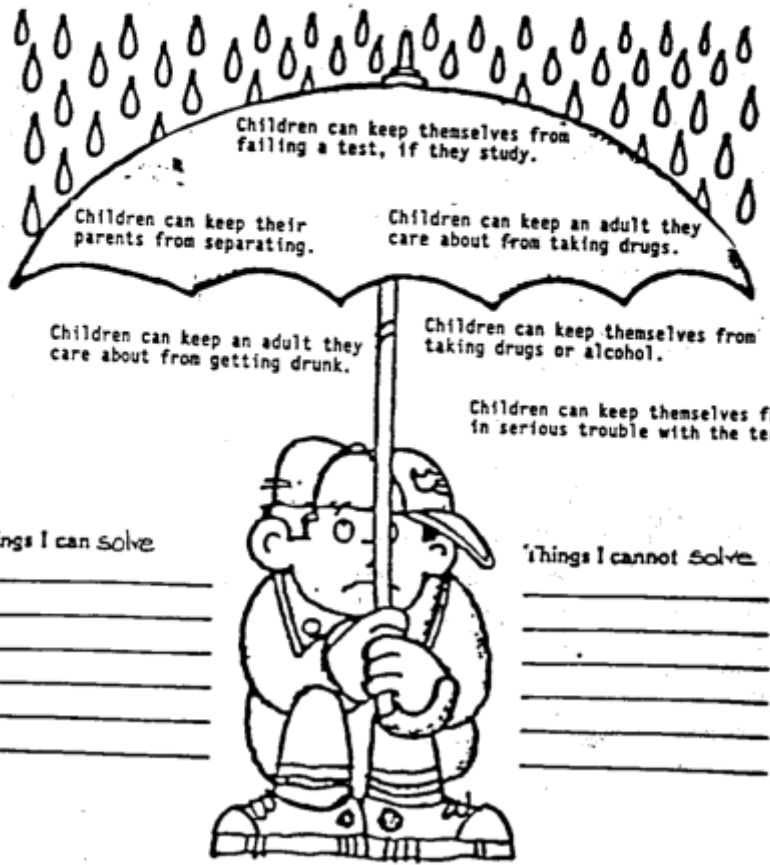
## Individual skills

Learning to differentiate which problems they can and which they cannot solve

### Things I CAN and cannot solve :

There are some things about which we feel sad that we cannot control. For example, we cannot control a volcano that erupts and hurts many people.  
We also feel sad about some things which we can control. For example, in our anger, we may hurt someone's feelings.  
After a volcano and after hurting someone's feelings we may feel sad. We cannot control a volcano, but we can control our anger.

Categorize the following situations into things that you can solve and things that you cannot solve. Add two items to each list.



Children can keep themselves from failing a test, if they study.

Children can keep their parents from separating.

Children can keep an adult they care about from taking drugs.

Children can keep an adult they care about from getting drunk.

Children can keep themselves from taking drugs or alcohol.

Children can keep themselves from getting in serious trouble with the teacher

Things I can solve

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Things I cannot solve

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# Children's protective factors

## Family

- ▶ Two factors most consistently predict children's well-being:
  1. level of conflict between parents
  2. quality of parenting (by both parents – regardless of which one provides most of child's care)
- ▶ Promoting resilience involves:
  - reducing conflict
  - improving quality of parenting by one or both parents

# Children's protective factors

## Family

- ▶ Protection from conflict between parents
- ▶ Quality, authoritative parenting
- ▶ Psychological well-being of parents
- ▶ Cooperative co-parenting (except in situations of domestic violence or abuse)
- ▶ Healthy relationships between child and both parents
- ▶ Household structure and stability
- ▶ Supportive sibling relations

# Children's protective factors

## Outside the family

- ▶ Supportive relationship with positive adult models
- ▶ Support network: family, school, faith, community
- ▶ Evidence-based preventive interventions for children and families
- ▶ Legal procedures that reduce conflict
- ▶ Supportive, authoritative schools
- ▶ Healthy peer relationships

# Quality parenting

A critical protective factor



# Quality parenting

## A definition

- ▶ High quality parenting refers to the **relationship between the parent and child**
  - Includes both **warmth and discipline**
  - sometimes referred to as authoritative parenting
- ▶ Different from amount of time with parent
  - Amount of time with either parent not related to child outcomes
- ▶ Different from co-parenting
  - Refers to degree to which parents cooperate with one another in parenting – consult with one another, make joint decisions, coordinate activities

# Quality parenting

## New research

- ▶ Quality of parenting by mothers and fathers has potential to modify children's resilience, even in high conflict divorces
  - Quality parenting by either parent protects child against low quality parenting by the other parent
- ▶ New evidence shows relationship between quality parenting by custodial mother and noncustodial father and reductions in children's mental health problems

Miles, Cookston, Braver, Sandler & DeLuse, 2007



# Quality Parenting

Emotionally intelligent parenting practices





# Quality parenting

## Practices that promote resilience

- ▶ Warm and involved
- ▶ Clear guidelines and limits
- ▶ Age appropriate expectations
- ▶ Acknowledging feelings
- ▶ Open communication
- ▶ Respectful listening
- ▶ Staying connected
- ▶ Positive relationship nurtured between child and both parents, other caring adults or mentors
- ▶ Family routines—meals, work and play together

# Quality parenting

Resilience results in:

- ▶ Better school achievement
- ▶ Less depression and anxiety
- ▶ Higher self-concept
- ▶ Less substance use
- ▶ Less delinquency

# ACT-For the Children

Evidence-based parent education program

- provides information and skills
- protect children from conflict
- strengthen effective parenting and foster resilience.
- 7 hour program, co facilitated by mental health professionals
- Based on research on risk and protective factors
- Child well being
- Quality Parenting
- Legal process

# Effective parent education



# Effective parent education

## First, do no harm....

- ▶ Be sensitive to domestic violence
- ▶ Do not attribute all child problems to divorce
  - or to just one parent
- ▶ Acknowledge and recognize grief and differing emotional time tables
- ▶ Acknowledge conflict as a way of staying connected

# Effective parent education

Provide a positive, empowering message to parents

- ▶ Emphasize what they *can* control
- ▶ Educate about the benefits of containing conflict and collaborating, when safe to do so
- ▶ Explain the powerful protective factor of quality parenting, with warmth **and** limits

# Effective parent education

Choose words carefully: language shapes behavior

▶ Not: “visitation”

Instead: “parenting time” and “parenting plan”

▶ Encourage parents to refer to “*our* child”

▶ Encourage respectful, businesslike language and relationship between parents

# Effective parent education

- ▶ Remind parents of importance of self care—seeking help is sign of strength
- ▶ Protect children from on-going parent conflict
- ▶ Teach examples of quality parenting
- ▶ Promote healthy relationships between child and both parents, when safe to do so
- ▶ Help parents listen to children—to discover what they feel but seldom say



Continue your good work



# Continue your good work

## Key points

1. Increase focus on the specifics of quality parenting by mothers, fathers or other caregivers as an important source of children's resilience.
2. Help parents reduce or contain conflict to protect children and increase quality parenting.
3. Provide evidence-based interventions based on proven protective factors that foster resilience, with a message of hope and healing.
4. Remember that long-term problems are not inevitable—prevention is key.

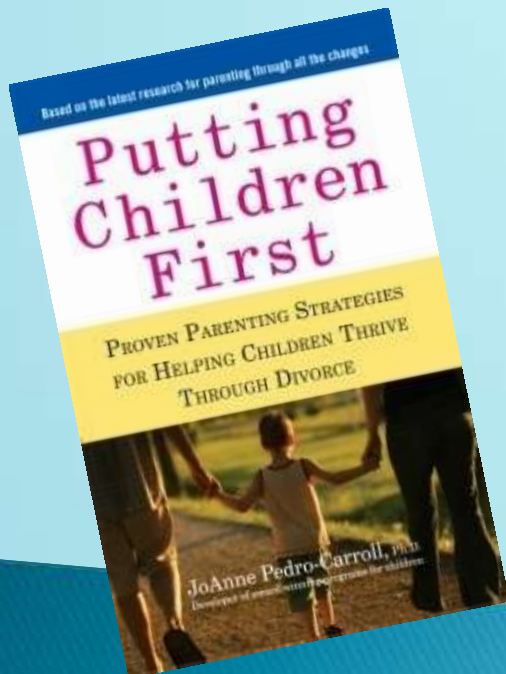


*“There can be no keener revelation  
of a society’s soul than the way in  
which it treats its children.”*

Nelson Mandela

# Putting Children First:

How to reduce risk and foster resilience in children who are dealing with separation and divorce



## Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll

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- *NAPPA Gold Award, National Association of Parenting Publications*
- *Gold Recipient, Mom's Choice Awards*

# Part 2 of 2

# Program goals

- **Message of hope, healing and empowerment.**
- **Divorce is a stressful process, but long term problems for children are NOT an automatic outcome.**
- **Foster children's resilience and healthy adjustment.**
- **Many things parents can do to help their children. That is the focus of this program.**

# Session I

- **Adult's feelings and reactions**
- **Children's feelings**
- **Protecting children from conflict**
- **Importance of effective parenting**
- **Cooperative and parallel parenting**
- **Video**
- **Role plays**

# Session II



- **Presentation on legal process by a judge and lawyer**
- **Focus on helpful ways to contain conflict and keep children out of the middle**
- **Skills for communication and problem solving**
- **Small groups to focus on ways to help your children**



# Domestic Violence



- A pattern of behavior in which one partner exerts power and control over the other partner or others in the family
- Physical, emotional, psychological or economic abuse/pressure
- Your safety and that of the children comes **FIRST**
- Concepts of coparenting may not apply
- See Parents' Handbook Page 2

# Prevention of Problems



- Take care of your health
- Practice effective parenting
- Provide household stability
- Maintain a healthy relationship with your children
- Reduce conflict with former partner
- Long term problems are not inevitable

# Adult Reactions



- What are the first words that come to mind when you hear the word “divorce?”

# Children's Reactions



- How do you think your children feel?
- How hard is it to listen to your children's feelings when you too are hurting?

# Your Comments Tell Us that Breaking Up is



- Stressful for both parents and children
- Children can have similar feelings to their parents, but may have mixed feelings that are not the same as a parent's feelings.
- Children may feel vulnerable, no control
- Recognize that children may not be able to put their feelings into words
- Key for parents: observe and listen to your children and acknowledge their feelings

# Psychological and physical well-being of the parents



- **Parent well-being leads to better adjustment for children**
- **If you take good care of yourself, you can take better care of your children**
- **Get support or therapy**
  - **Most people can benefit from therapy or support when dealing with a divorce**
  - **Getting help when we need it is a sign of strength**

*More on...*

# Psychological and physical well-being of the parents



- **Find healthy ways to deal with stress**
  - Regular exercise, yoga, meditation, dance
  - Avoid use of drugs and alcohol to relax
  - Seek out supportive friends/support groups
  - Adequate rest
  - Take care physically, emotionally, spiritually

# Warning Signs: When help is needed



- Continuous depression or anger
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feeling bad most of the time instead of some of the time
- Feeling unable to cope
- Prevention is best—seek help early!



What's going to happen  
to me?

# Children's Age Based Reactions to Divorce



- See p.48 in the Parent Handbook for this information:  
**BRIEF OVERVIEW**
- Infants and toddlers
- Preschool
- School age
- Adolescents

*More on...*

# Infants and toddlers



## Three main causes of psychological distress:

1. Unpredictable daily routines
2. Hostilities between parents
3. Emotional instability of a parent, especially of the primary caretaker

# How parents can help Infants and toddlers



- **Set up consistent, predictable daily routines**
- **Stay businesslike and respectful with the other parent, especially in front of the children**
- **Take good care of yourself—for you and your children**
  - **Physically, emotionally, spiritually**
  - **Get support from others**
  - **Work through anger and depression with professional help, if needed**

# 3 to 5 year-old children



- **A common concern is fear of abandonment**
  - **More confusion, fear and guilt**
  - **“If Mommy and Daddy can stop loving each other, they may stop loving me.”**
  
- **Children may regress to earlier behaviors**
  - **Sign of stress**
  - **Response to anxiety and/or sadness**

*More on...*

## **3 to 5 year-old children**



- **Aggressive behavior may increase**
- **Guilt and misconceptions are common**

# How parents can help 3 to 5 year-olds



- **Provide reassurance of never-ending care and love**
  - **Clearly and frequently, in words and behaviors**
- **Develop consistency between the two parents' homes**
  - **In expectations and limit setting**
  - **In guidance and structure**
  - **Encourage access to both parents, if it is safe**
  - **Use a calendar to let child know when she/he will see you again**

*More on...*

# How parents can help 3 to 5 year-olds



## ■ Respect your children's fears

- Reassure your children that the breakup is *not their fault*
- Provide extra reassurance when separating from them
- Explain clearly who will be taking care of them and when you'll be back
- Accept child's feelings of anger but set limits on negative behavior



## 6 to 8 year-old children



- Very strong feelings of grief and sadness
- Feelings/Fears of deprivation
- Yearning to have both parents together
- Misconceptions
- Physical symptoms related to anxiety

# How parents can help 6 to 8 year-olds



- **Encourage positive relationships with both parents**
  - **Keep children out of conflict, do not put them in the middle!**
  
- **Remind child that divorce is a “grown-up problem,” not one they caused or can fix**

# How parents can help 6 to 8 year-olds



- **Create stability, structure, healthy routines**
  
- **Reassure the children that they are loved unconditionally by both parents**
  - **Reassure them that they are loved, valued, and that you will take good care of them**
  
  - **Remember that children often doubt their parents' love during this time**

## 9 to 12 year-old children



- Express anger to relieve feelings of sadness and helplessness
- May feel “different” from others
- Prone to feeling caught in the middle of parent conflict
- Need help focusing on what they can control (doing well in school) instead of parents’ problems

# How parents can help 9 to 12 year-olds



- **Encourage involvement positive activities that build on their strengths**
  
- **Encourage relationships with both parents when it is safe to do so**
  - **Keep children out of the middle of conflicts**
  - **Children have the right to love both parents**
  - **Children's Bill of Rights**

*More on...*

# How parents can help 9 to 12 year-olds



- **Keep consistent rules across households**
- **Work hard not to criticize or argue with the other parent in front of the children**
  - **Help your child learn to resolve conflicts by watching you negotiate and compromise.**
  - **Remember—your child is part of both parents. Comment on positive qualities of other parent.**

# 13 to 18 year-olds

- **May feel angry and doomed to have unsuccessful relationships**
  - Working on issues of trust in relationships
  
- **May act out sexually**
  - Especially if parents' sexual behavior is more visible
  - Especially if there is less attention to the limits and behavior of the adolescent

# How parents can help 13 to 18 year-olds



- **Keep both parents active in their lives, with love and limits**
- **Monitor activities and stay involved with clear rules, limits and expectation for behavior**
- **Protect them from being too aware of parents' sexuality**
- **Continue to protect them from getting caught in parental conflict**



# Keeping children out of adult conflicts and issues



- **Divorce or separation is *less harmful* than ongoing conflict between parents**
  - **Especially if the children are in the middle**
  - **If conflict is intense and continues over time**
  - **Especially hard on children when it becomes physical and verbally abusive**

# “I” messages



## The two simple parts:

- How does the problem situation make me feel?
- What would I like the other person to do differently?

I FEEL \_\_\_\_\_,

OR I'M CONCERNED ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_

WHEN \_\_\_\_\_.

COULD WE PLEASE \_\_\_\_\_?

# Review “I” Messages



- Remember the “Golden Rule” of Communication:
- Keep “you never” and “you always” out of comments
- Instead use “I’m concerned about..” or “I feel”
- Practice Practice Practice!

- Parent conflict through the eyes of a child...
- ROLE PLAYS WITH JESSIE
- Volunteers please?

# Working towards a **Business-like partnership with the co-parent**



- **Think “business partner” when you think of the other parent**
  - Remember you have a common investment in your precious children
  - This will take time and effort
  
- **Move to a more formal relationship with the other parent**
  - Accomplish financial arrangements and decisions about the children

*More on...*

# A business-like partnership



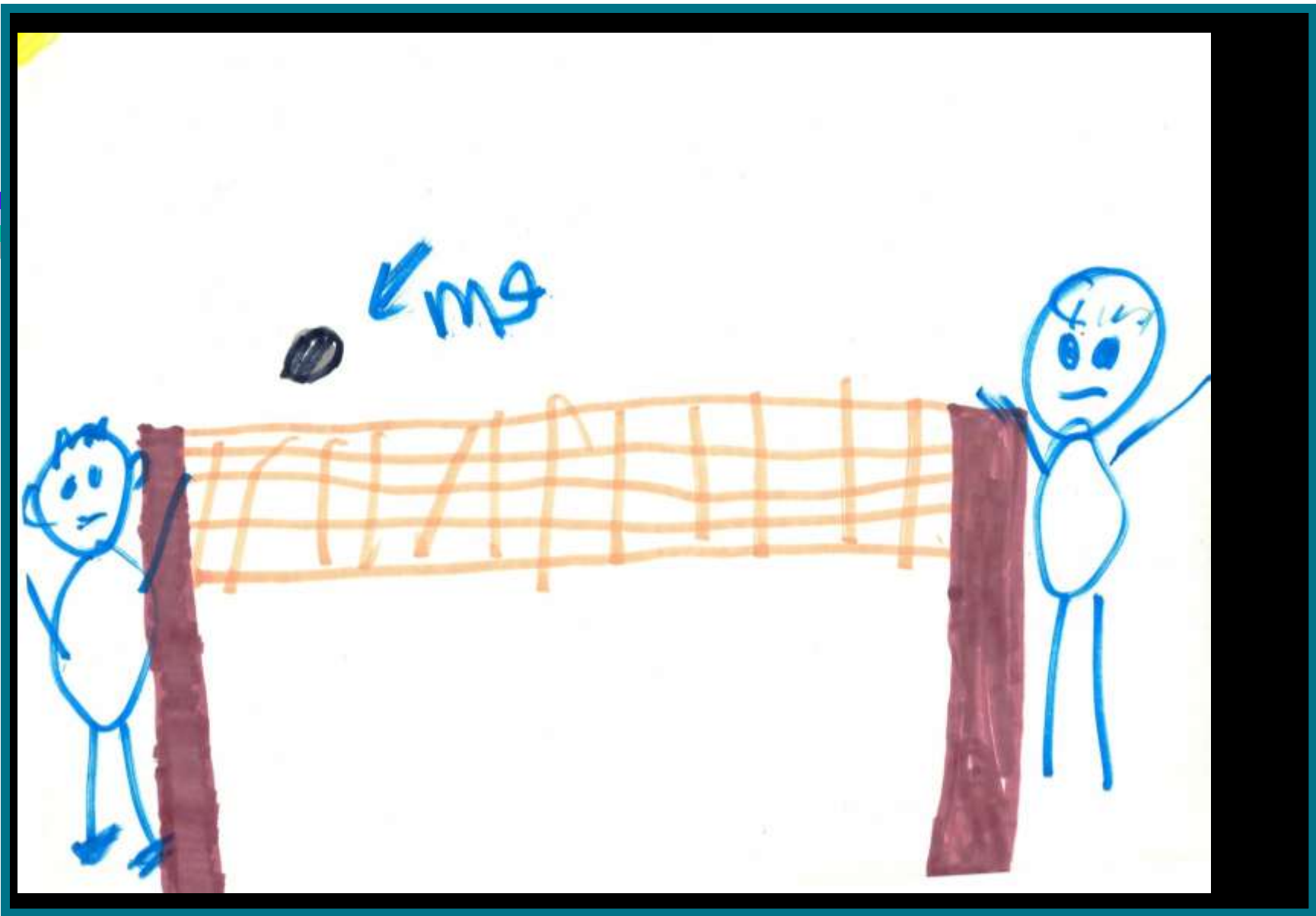
- **Adopt a business-like manner with former partner**
  - **Use courtesy, respect, and a relatively formal, low-key approach**

*More on...*

# A business-like partnership



- **Make appointments for phone call or neutral site—if it is safe to meet in person**
  - At a low stress time
  - With no children present
  - With a specific agenda on children's needs
  - Use a problem solving approach
  
- **Be specific about:**
  - Plans
  - Schedules
  - Requests





*More on...*

# A business-like partnership



- **Do not expect appreciation, praise or emotional support**
- **Give the other parent the benefit of the doubt**
- **Do not use your child as a messenger!**
  - **Use direct deposit for child support payment, respectful email to communicate**
  - **Phone when/where the children can't hear the conversation**

# Cooperative parenting



- **When low conflict interaction is possible**
- **Use more flexibility and negotiation**
- **Still follow up in writing about agreements that change the schedule**
- **Continue to be respectful and business-like, as you would at your job**

# Parallel parenting

Parallel Parenting ← TIME → Cooperative Parenting

- The continuum may change with circumstances
- The parenting relationship may change over time
- In situations of domestic violence parallel parenting is recommended to reduce risk of high conflict or violence

# The parenting continuum: Co-operative to parallel



## Co-operative parenting

Low or moderate conflict —————>

Flexibility/negotiation —————>

Decisions jointly —————>

Parents work together —————>  
for child

## Parallel parenting

High conflict or abuse

Stick to legal agreement

Decisions made through  
legal agreement or third  
party

Parents work separately  
in child's best interests

*More on...*



## **Parallel parenting**

- **When calm communication is not possible**
- **Be businesslike; use common courtesy**
- **Do not plan activities for the child during the other parent's time**
- **Don't expect flexibility and negotiation in the schedule**
- **Remember the goal is to minimize conflict**

## Connecting with children



# Promote positive relationship between Child and both parents



- Listen to children's feelings-even when it's hard to do!
- Encourage children's healthy relationship with both parents and extended family, if it is safe to do so.
- Always avoid put downs of the other parent.
- Remember your child is 50% of both parents. Any attack of the other parent feels to the child like an attack on them.

# Quality Parenting

## Two pillars



### 1. Warmth and empathy:

*“All feelings are okay.”*

### 2. Clear limits and expectations for behavior:

*“All behaviors are not okay.”*







*“I’ve learned that people will forget what  
you said,  
people will forget what you did,  
but people will never forget how you  
made them feel.”*

Maya Angelou

# Quality parenting



## Listening to children:

- Pay attention
- Remain neutral
- Listen actively
- Rephrase and empathize
- Keep listening
- Join and problem solve



**CALVIN & HOBBES BILL WATTERSON**

IM IN A VERY CRABBY MOOD, SO EVERYBODY JUST LEAVE ME ALONE! I HATE EVERYONE!!



NOBODY RECOGNIZES MY HINTS TO SMOTHER ME WITH AFFECTION



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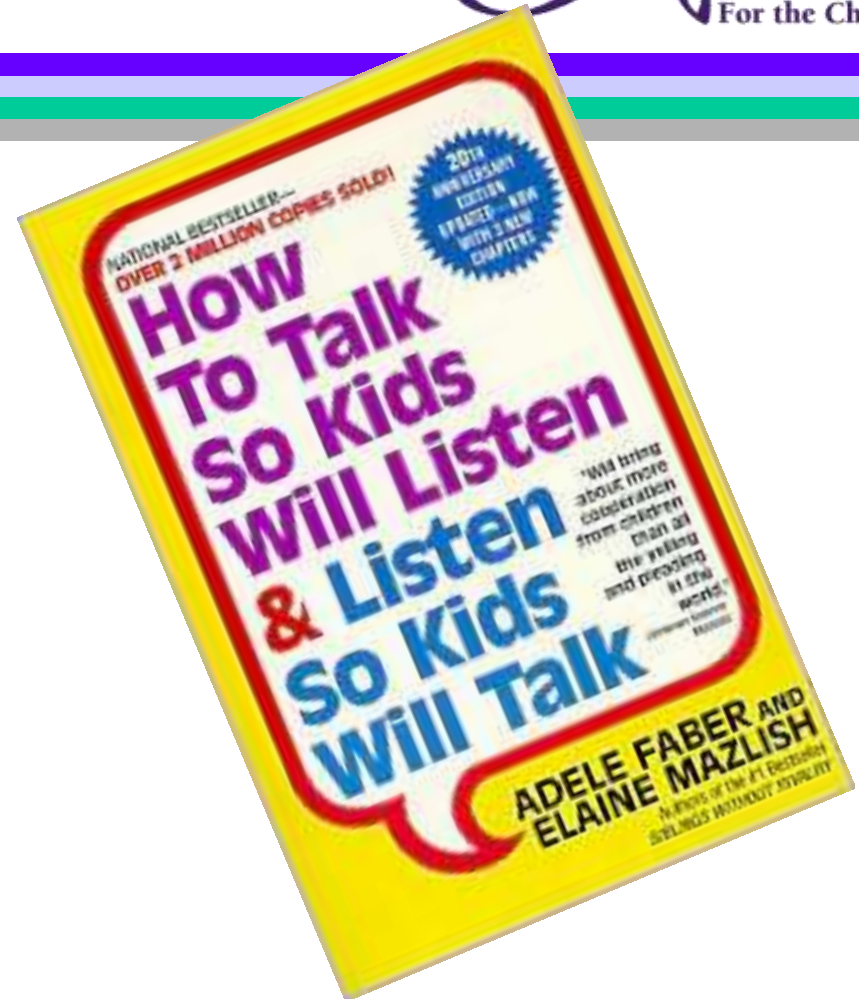
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# Quality parenting



## ► How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk

Faber & Mazlish, 1980



*Instead of denying the feelings...*



*...Give the feeling a name*



# Practice effective parenting with Warmth, limit setting and a structured home environment



- **Create and maintain strong, loving relationships with your children**
- **Enjoy regular meals together, routines and traditions**
- **Spend quality time with each child**  
(at least 15 minutes each day)
  - **Share conversation**
  - **Read**
  - **Play and do fun things together**
  - **Give frequent, positive feedback to your children**



*More on...*

## Effective parenting



- **Catch them being good: Give frequent, positive feedback to your children about their behavior and character strengths. “I like the way you didn’t give up on those math problems. You were determined...”**
- **Effective parenting depends in part on how parents treat each other.**



*More on...*

## **Effective parenting**



- **Mistreating a partner, or any form of violence or abuse is not responsible parenting**
- **Be a model for accepting responsibility for behavior and choices**
- **Even one parent choosing to be effective has a positive impact on children**

*More on...*

## Effective parenting



- **Maintain your role as the parent—do not expect your child to be friend, confidante or little “man or woman of the house.”**
- **All feelings are ok—all behaviors aren’t ok. Children need and want limits when their behavior is disrespectful, inappropriate or out of control.**

*More on...*

## Effective parenting



- Give children opportunities for some sense of control, or structured choices: “math or spelling homework, which do you want to do first?”
- “Do you want to go to bed now or in 5 minutes?”
- Remember the power of positive one to one time with each child

# Practice effective parenting



- **Use warmth, limit-setting and a structured home environment**
  
- **Structure:**
  - Regular meal times together
  - Early bedtimes
  - Less TV
  - Set appropriate rules and limits
  
- **Maintain favorite family routines and traditions**

# Dating and your children



- **Make the children the top priority when they are with you**
- **Schedule date time when your child is with the other parent or away from home**

*More on...*

## Dating and your children



- **Let them adjust to their new family situation *before* introducing someone new**
  - **Remember they need lots of attention and reassurance after the separation**
  - **A new relationship may arouse fears of abandonment**
  - **Wait until the relationship is stable and potentially serious before introducing the person to your children**



# The formula for a happy child



- H Help create security**
- A Actively listen to your child**
- P Provide rules and consistency**
- P Protect your child from the painful conflict**
- Y You commit to a better life**



# Session II



- Welcome Back!
- Presentation on Legal Process
- Strategies for Containing Conflict
- “Keeping children out of the middle” DVD
- “I” messages for effective communication
- Small group discussion and role play with a focus on helping your children

# More on Children and Conflict...



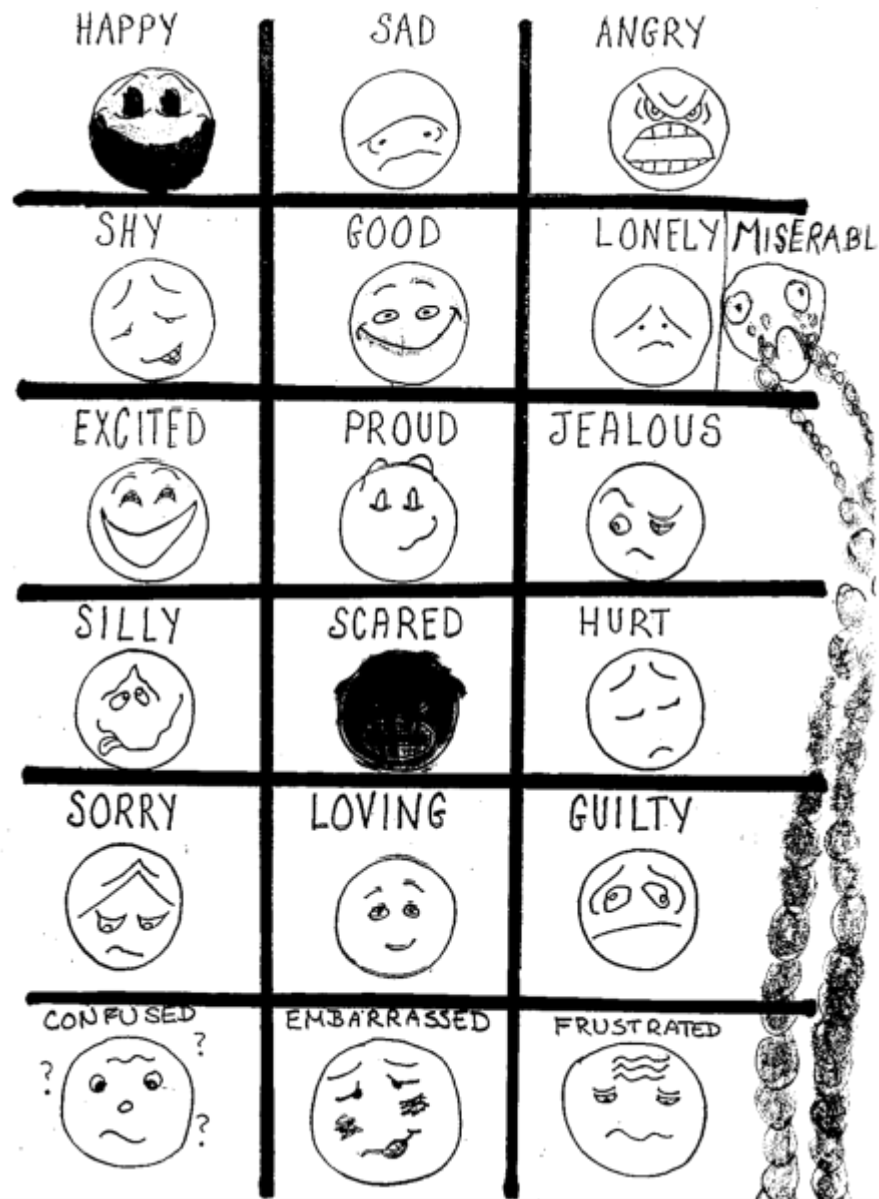
- Children learn what they live...
- If they see frequent fighting , they'll want to fight
- If they see the two people they love most—their parents—be civil to each other, they feel more secure, loved, and proud of their parents
- Children need their parents to model self-control and respectful behavior—even when they are angry or hurt.

# Skills for defusing conflict and managing anger



## Some of the reasons for anger:

- It's easier to feel angry than very sad
- It can feel powerful
- It's easier to blame someone else
- It's easier to leave when you're angry
- It keeps the other person talking/engaged/connected
- But it can keep you stuck in painful resentment



# Tips for handling anger



- 1. Ask yourself what other feelings are behind your anger, like sadness or hurt. Allow yourself time to grieve the losses.**
- 2. Consider the consequences and take a “time out.” Try to talk later, after you are calm.**
- 3. Write about your feelings. Do not send it until it is constructive and promotes solutions and healing.**

# Tips for handling anger



4. Reach out to trusted friends and a therapist for support in handling your anger constructively.
5. Remember your children and how it can help them to see you deal with your emotions in healthy ways.
6. Refocus on the positives in life. Exercise and humor are healthy ways to release anger and reduce stress.

# Instead of staying stuck....



- It helps to remember:
- Forgiveness is a choice
- Multiple benefits to the forgiver and the forgiven
- Forgiveness promotes healing and peace of mind—even better parenting!

# Steps in decision-making and conflict resolution



- 1. Make an appointment**
- 2. Have an agenda**
- 3. Use “I” statements**
- 4. Listen and keep an open mind**
- 5. Brainstorm options**
- 6. Choose an option/solution**
- 7. Test it**
- 8. Review and revise as needed**



# Time for Small Groups



- Focus on the most important: your children
- Focus on what you CAN control: your children's healthy development, being an effective parent
- Let go of what you CANNOT control: other people's behavior
- Spend 1 to 1 time with your children in positive activities
- Love and Limits

# Advice from children for parents



Let us know that it's OK to love both of you. Don't make us choose between the two of you.

Spend time with us. Ask how we feel about all the stuff that has happened in our family. We may act like it's "no big deal," but we need a chance to talk to you.

Let us know that you love us. Even if we act like we already know, tell us again.

# Rebuild your life

- R** Recognize the importance of taking care of yourself
- E** Establish a plan for creating your future
- B** Build a working relationship with your former partner
- U** Understand that win/win solutions are possible
- I** Improve your understanding of your child's needs
- L** Learn the key ingredients for helping your child with divorce
- D** Divorce is both an ending and a beginning—here's to healthy new beginnings!



“Divorce is sad, but it’s not the end of the world for me or my family...”

# A message of hope to take home...



- Divorce is hard on families, yet how parents handle changes and create new beginnings makes a big difference in children's healthy adjustment
- Thank you for your time and attention
- ***WE WISH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY ALL THE BEST IN THE FUTURE***



*“There can be no keener revelation  
of a society’s soul than the way in  
which it treats its children.”*

Nelson Mandela



For more information or to purchase ACT-For the Children program manuals and DVDs, please contact:

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## Dr. JoAnne Pedro-Carroll

*Author, Putting Children First: Proven Parenting Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce*

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For more information, please go to the main website and browse for more videos on this topic or check out our additional resources.

## Additional Resources

### Online resources:

1. Dr. Pedro-Carroll's website: <http://www.pedro-carroll.com/>
2. Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology website: <http://effectivechildtherapy.com>

### Books:

1. Faber, A., & Mazlish E. (1980). *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk*. New York, New York: Avon Books Inc.
2. Pedro-Carroll, J. (2010). *Putting Children First: Proven Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce*. New York: Avery.

### Selected Peer-reviewed Journal Articles:

1. Pedro-Carroll, J.L. (2005). Fostering resilience in the aftermath of divorce: The role of evidence-based program for children. *Family Court Review*, 43, 52-64.
2. Pedro-Carroll, J.L. (2001). The promotion of wellness in children and families: Challenges and opportunities. *American Psychologist*, 56(11), 993-1004.

