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## Expressive Arts Manual for Children of Divorce

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**Expressive Arts Manual  
For Children of Divorce**

**Monica Moffet, B.A.**

**An Abstract Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate  
School of Lindenwood College in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts**

**1989**



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## Abstract

This manuscript examines the short-term and long-term reactions and adjustment of children of divorce. Interventions which are available and have been utilized in the schools, community and therapy are reviewed. The limitations and specifications of these interventions point to the need for an intervention that has multiple uses for a variety of settings and ages. A creative arts activity manual has been developed which may be used in individual, group therapy work or for support group or time-limited types of intervention. Forty activities for children (ages 3-18) address divorce issues and feelings. The manual was evaluated by 20 professionals. The evaluators rated the manual as being effective in their work with children of divorce and requested that additional future activities be developed.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The dramatic rise in the rate of divorce in the United States is well documented. The United States Bureau of Census data indicate that nearly one child in three experiences parental divorce before the age of eighteen. By the mid-1990's, nearly one out of every two children will spend part of his or her time living in a post-divorce household (Glick, 1979). This sociological phenomenon has led to intensive efforts to investigate the potential impact of marital disruption on the social, emotional and cognitive development of the children involved. An emerging consensus is that parental divorce constitutes an immediate and major disequilibrium in the lives of children (Gardner, 1976; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980; Kalter, 1985; Guidubaldi & Perry, 1984).

While the period surrounding the actual parental separation is often highly stressful for children, the post-divorce long-term stressors require as many or more coping efforts than the actual parental separation. Among the most powerful stressors are downward economic mobility and all too often poverty, frequent shifts in residence, continued hostility between parents, infrequent or near total lack of contact with the noncustodial parent, and parental dating and remarriage. These post-divorce stressors are likely to be key factors in producing long-term negative reactions for many children of divorce (Kalter, 1986).

All children of divorce experience an initial period of surprise, shock, and sad or angry feelings. However, wide variability is seen in the quality and intensity of children's responses and adaptation.

Some children exhibit severe or sustained disruptions in development, whereas others seem to negotiate a turbulent divorce and stressful aftermath and emerge as competent well-functioning individuals (Brody, 1986).

Considering the magnitude of change in family stability and the historical centrality of nuclear family structure as the basis for socialization of children, it is surprising that so little has been done to provide an empirical understanding of the impact of parental divorce on children. Recent evaluations describe the research that has been done on this subject as flawed by limited data-gathering procedures, biased sample selection, inadequate controls and other serious methodological weaknesses (Shinn, 1978; Hetherington, 1979; Levitin, 1979; Clingempeel & Reppucci, 1982; Kurdek, 1981, 1983). It is consistently indicated that the interaction of familial, social, cultural, economic, legal and psychological systems with the effects of divorce has not been adequately documented. There is also a lack of longitudinal research that discriminates between crisis-related effects immediately following divorce, from the long-term impact of childrens' and parents' adjustment (Guidubaldi, Perry, Climinshaw & McLoughlin, 1983).

The high incidence of divorce coupled with what is known about children's reactions and adjustment mandate inquiry into the particular psychological needs of the children involved. Benedek and Benedek (1979) report that the psychological needs of children of divorce, the degree in which these needs are being met, and the measures taken to meet these needs are essentially inadequate

(Benedek & Benedek, 1979).

Research done on the outcome of therapeutic interventions in divorce can be classified into three broad categories: individual therapy for children, family approaches, and groups. Despite a number of techniques that have been developed in each of these formats (see Hodges, 1986), only a handful of systematic treatment-outcome studies have been conducted (Rembar, Novick, & Kalter, 1982; Bloom, Hodges, & Caldwell, 1982; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). Other than the observation that divorced families frequently drop out of traditional child-guidance clinics (Rembar, Novick, & Kalter, 1982), individual therapy has not been systematically studied at all. School-based groups have been evaluated in a handful of empirical studies. Family therapy interventions have only been investigated incidentally (Emery, 1988).

While the empirical research on available interventions is scarce there are a number of support group interventions or therapeutic techniques which have been described in the literature (Hodges, 1986). Most of these programs and techniques are limited by their specifications for a certain setting, age group, or time frame. For example, some programs (Cantor, 1977; Stolberg & Cullen, 1983; Kalter, 1984) target specific ages while others are time limited such as Rainbows for Children (Yehl, 1986), Helping Children of Divorce (Green, 1978), and The Children of Family Change program (Holdahl & Caspersen, 1977). These are also designed for the school setting and based upon education and support (Hodges, 1986).

Therapeutic techniques available focus on specific issues which

are common, such as loss and grief (Toomin, 1974) or redefining oneself in terms of the family changes (Hodges, 1986; Kressel, 1985; Wallerstein, 1983).

It is the hypothesis of this thesis that there is a need for an intervention that is not limited in use by specifications, such as age group, setting, or theoretical orientation.

### Statement of Purpose

In an attempt to improve upon and bridge the gap between available techniques and interventions a manual has been developed which: (a) may be used with a wide age range, (b) is adaptable for time-limited support groups, or (c) therapeutic issues and settings. The activities in the manual facilitate communication, clarify and validate feelings, and develop coping skills through the use of creative arts activities.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

#### The Divorce Experience

Divorce has become a very common event in the United States (Emery, 1988). In considering how children cope with divorce, it is an injustice to a great number of families to suggest that the event is inevitably pathological for the children. To also suggest that divorce is an "insignificant transition" reveals insensitivity (Emery, 1988).

If there is one thing that characterizes all divorces, it is change. Some changes begin well before the physical separation, while others continue long after the legal divorce. Changes in the family can result in an improved or worsened quality of life, but they do require that children adapt to them. Therefore the psychological impact of divorce on children must be considered on at least two levels of reactions and adjustment (Emery, 1988).

Divorce represents a series of life changes which are highly stressful and disruptive for the great majority of children. Most children respond initially with distress. This short-term reaction is normal and expected if it is time-limited in nature (Kalter, 1986).

Researchers such as Kalter and Wallerstein have become increasingly concerned with the post-divorce, long term reactions and adjustment of children of divorce. It is the post-divorce stressors, rather than the turmoil at the time of divorce, that are key factors in producing long-term negative reactions for many children of divorce (Kalter, 1986).

### Short-Term Reactions

In looking at the initial reactions of children to a parental divorce, Hodges (1986) reports that all children, regardless of age, experience the divorce of their parents as a major stressful event. Much of what researchers and professionals know about the initial reactions of children of divorce comes from the pioneering work of Wallerstein and Kelly (1974, 1975, 1976, 1980a, 1980b). They suggest that children respond and adjust differently according to age. Their original study was based on a sample of 131 children, aged 2 through 18 years, from 60 divorced families in California. By interviewing the children and family members immediately after the separation, and then at 1, 5 and 10 years following the divorce, they were able to make several conclusions about short-term and long-term reactions and adjustment.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) report that often noted initial difficulties or reactions in the preschool years include confusion, a strong sense of insecurity, and sadness. Clinging and whining behavior along with developmental regressions are not unusual, at least initially.

In the early elementary school years (grades K-3) intense and pervasive sadness, self-blame/guilt, and some confusion about what divorce means are frequently in evidence. Loyalty conflicts over which parent to side with also begin to emerge. Children of this age are described as the most defenseless against these upsetting feelings so they appear to be the age group most obviously affected (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974). An exception is the angry, combative child, often a boy,

who is a discipline problem at home and/or school, but through his aggressive behavior rids himself of painful feelings of helplessness and sadness.

The later elementary school age youngster (grades 4-6) tends to struggle with intense angry feelings about the divorce, sadness, and pronounced loyalty conflicts. Behaviorally, these emotions can be expressed in such ways as open anger or defiance toward the custodial parent, passive-aggressive stubbornness toward the mother or teachers, and fighting with peers (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1974).

The high school adolescent's (grades 7-12) reactions include feelings of shame, embarrassment, anxiety about the future and worry about the individuation process from parents. According to Wallerstein and Kelly (1974), at a time when teenagers are trying to come to terms with their own sexuality, a parental divorce tends to heighten their awareness of their parents' sexuality as parents begin dating. At this developmental stage conflicts may take the form of precocious sexuality, intense jealousy and anger at the same sex parent and increased anti-social activities.

Although initial short term reactions are expected in most children, given the degree of disequilibrium and changes that occur in their lives, it is also important to look at the long-term effects and reactions (Kalter, 1981).

### Long-Term Reactions

Clinical and research findings suggest that perhaps 50% of children of divorce continue to experience divorce related conflicts

years after their parents' divorce (Kulka & Weingarten, 1979; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Wallerstein, 1985).

Wallerstein (1985) reports that at the 10-year follow-up of her study many of the children interviewed were now adults. Overall, 45% were doing "well" as they had emerged as competent, compassionate and courageous people. But 41% were doing poorly in that they were entering adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating and sometimes angry young men and women. Wallerstein states that it is too soon to tell how the rest will adjust (Wallerstein, 1985).

Perhaps Wallerstein's (1985) most significant finding was that feelings of sadness and anger continued to pervade the children's comments about the divorce itself. She also notes that: (a) three out of five children felt rejected by at least one parent, (b) half grew up in settings in which parental conflict was pervasive and continuing, (c) two-thirds of the girls were unable to make lasting commitments and feared betrayal in relationships, and (d) many boys failed to develop a sense of independence, confidence and purpose (Wallerstein, 1985).

In cross-sectional research, evidence on the psychological outcomes of divorce for children include seven specific areas of functioning: (a) utilization of mental health services; (b) externalizing problems, such as delinquency aggression, and disobedience; (c) internalizing problems, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem; (d) intellectual and academic functioning, such as behavior, grades and test scores; (e) social competence or peer relations; and (f) functioning during adult life such as attainment of career goals and human relationships.



There is evidence that children from divorced families are over-represented in outpatient mental health clinics (Kalter, 1977; Kalter & Rembar, 1981; Tuckman & Regan, 1966). In a study by the National Survey of Children (Zill, 1978) children of divorce were found to have a two to three times greater likelihood of contact with a mental health professional (Zill, 1978).

More specific behavioral outcomes are examined by Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1978), in which they found children whose parents were divorced to be more disobedient, aggressive, demanding, and lacking in self-control. It has also been noted that "divorce may be the single largest cause of childhood depression" (McDermott, Tseng, Char, & Fukunga 1978, p. 104). Studies suggest a higher incidence of delinquency and anti-social behavior among children of divorce than among those from intact households (McDermott, 1970).

Two detailed reviews of a substantial body of studies by Shinn (1978) and Hetherington (1981) concluded that children reared in single-parent families perform more poorly on a variety of academic measures than do children from two-parent families (Shinn, 1978; Hetherington, Camara, & Featherman, 1981). Another study by Guidubaldi, Cleminshaw, Perry, and Mcloughlin (1983) found extensive differences between children from divorced and intact homes in terms of classroom behavior ratings, absenteeism, peer relations, and Wide Range Achievement Test scores.

In terms of social competence, Robert Weiss (1979a) suggests that because of increased practical and emotional demands, as well as changes in the family's authority structure, divorced children may

have to assume responsibilities at an earlier age than their peers. This may cause them to "grow up a little faster" and become precociously competent in social and practical matters (Weiss, 1979a). It is debatable whether this is a desirable or undesirable outcome as Wallerstein (1985) calls demand for early competence "over burdening" and feels that accelerated maturity deprives children of the opportunity to engage in age appropriate activities.

The limited research that has been done on the effects of a parental divorce in adulthood show a consistent finding about the adult outcome of divorce and the intergenerational transmission of marital instability (Emery, 1988). In several studies of large and representative samples, Pope and Mueller (1979) have documented that divorce is five to twelve percent more prevalent among adults whose parents experienced a marital disruption, compared to adults reared by their biological parents. Kilka and Weingarten (1979) also found evidence that married adults whose parents had divorced were more likely to report problems in their own marriages. Many observers (Montagu, 1971; Bowlby, 1973; Lynch, 1977) of childhood and adult losses suggest children who experience the early disruption of parental contact, whether through divorce, separation, or death, are among the very ones who upon maturation, will encounter interpersonal difficulties and fail to develop strong attachments to people as adults. Unresolved losses from childhood can also be factors that bring adults into counseling (Adler, 1927; Gould, 1978; Parkes, 1972).

### Other Factors Which Effect Adjustment

In looking at the early findings of the long-term effects of divorce on children it is also important to recognize those factors which predicate difficulty in making adjustment and those which facilitate successful adjustment.

Parental divorce sets in motion a myriad of subsequent life changes, each of which separately can be seen as a stressor in a child's life. These include: (a) changes in residence following a divorce with loss of established peer relationships; (b) loss of familiar school environment, and loss of the family home; (c) downward economic mobility with the emotional stress of making adjustments in lifestyle; (d) the mother's return to or increase in work which may reduce her energy and time for child-rearing; (e) less frequent contact with the non-custodial parent; (f) parental dating and the threat of losing a parent's affections to the other adult; and (g) remarriage and the complex adaptations required in forming a blended family (Kalter, 1985).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980b) report seven variables which have a positive effect on children's short and long-term adjustment to divorce. These are: (a) parental ability to resolve conflict and anger, (b) ability of custodial parent to successfully resume the parenting role, (c) ability of non-custodial parent to maintain a satisfying relationship with the child, (d) personality characteristics of the child and the ability to develop coping skills, (e) ability of the child to utilize support systems, and (f) the age and sex of the child (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980b).

### Services Needed

Benedek and Benedek (1979) state that the high incidence of divorce, coupled with its immense consequences, mandate inquiry into the particular psychological needs of the children involved. They feel that "all children of divorce are in need of at least some supportive services for some period of time" (Benedek & Benedek, 1979, p. 157).

Wallerstein (1986) feels that:

Children of divorce represent a hidden population, at risk for subsequent psychological problems and economic disadvantaging. Their needs and interests are insufficiently understood and poorly protected by the legal system, the medical and mental health community, the schools, and other institutions and agencies. (p. 14)

In terms of types of interventions needed for children of divorce Cantor (1982) states that:

Children of divorce need someone to advocate their position, to offer them support, and to meet their needs. Whether in the schools, mental health agencies, or private practice setting, professionals must create opportunities for the children of divorce to learn and grow, to develop insight and skills in coping with the problems created by divorce, and ultimately to reduce the stress created by divorce. (p. 85)

Benedek and Benedek (1979) suggest appropriate services would include advance education, goal-directed counseling, prescriptive therapy and education for the "system" involved in the legal aspects of divorce. Advance education would help to acquaint children and

parents with the actualities of the divorce process and the changed family situation. Goal-directed counseling identifies divorce-related problems and creates treatment which is intended to modify them. Prescriptive therapy focuses not only upon the general feelings that all children have about divorce, typically a sense of loss, but also special feelings of a child which are negating their adjustment, such as guilt about angry feelings over a parent's dating.

In terms of other intervention modalities, Nichols (1984) describes several different treatment approaches that would be beneficial for the child and the family system such as child therapy, therapy with a parent or parents, couples therapy, parent education and counseling, and therapy with the reorganized family system.

These approaches suggest that in addition to providing supportive psychological services for children, the needs of the family system must be addressed as well. (Hodges, 1986; Cantor & Drake, 1983). Hodges (1986) states that:

individual child therapy (when combined with work with one or both parents) is the treatment of choice in these types of situations: (a) when parents are psychologically unavailable for working in family therapy; (b) when the child's maladaptive behavior is related to past misinterpretations of events and is not corrected by less stressful interactions in the present; (c) when the child needs to separate his or her identity and problems from that of the parents; (d) when the child could benefit from a consistent, predictable therapist in the midst of a chaotic family life; and (e) when the child needs someone who

is neutral and objective and can provide advocacy. (p. 292)

### School Intervention Programs

Available interventions which focus on the child's experience of a parental divorce include school-based support groups for specific age levels, community based group interventions and individual therapy (Hodges, 1986). Pfeifer and Abrams (1984) note that:

schools are a natural setting for the delivery of some sort of intervention given the disruptive influence that divorce has upon the family, and the significance of the school to the child, it is important that compensatory resources be available there. This is consistent with an educational philosophy that is concerned with educating the whole child. (p. 23)

They add that groups are a natural forum for school-aged children and the discussion/support group model is based on the assumption that children can be resourceful with each other and can begin to work through, and at times solve, their own problems by sharing their thoughts and feelings (Pfeifer & Abrams, 1984).

Schools are a significant part of a child's life in terms of both time and preparation for adulthood. It is logical that our educational institutions be interested and involved in providing developmental assistance to children faced with "critical life situation such as parental divorce" (Wilkerson & Black, 1977).

According to Mandell and Garon (1986), the goals of school-based group experience are to help children of divorce to: (a) see they are not alone in their situation: (b) gain a more accurate understand-

ing of their family situation including the past, present and future; (c) learn to identify and express feelings; (d) to learn problem solving skills; and (e) practice effective communication.

An overview of available school-based group interventions are briefly described (see Hodges, 1986).

1. Cantor's (1977) program for grades 3-6 includes discussion on such topics as: being used by a parent, not liking having to choose between parents, loss of a parent, relationships with step-parents, visitation and court battles.
2. Wilkinson and Black's (1977) Children's Divorce Group (CDG) consists of eight sessions for 6th graders. Activities for each week utilize drawings, films, role playing and puppet plays.
3. Green's (1978) HELPING Children of Divorce programs is for elementary age children. The program is based on eight sessions with each session having an icebreaker activity, a stimulus activity and a closing time.
4. Holdahland Caspersen (1977) developed The Children Family Change program for children aged 8 to 12 years. The five one-hour sessions are designed to be educational in orientation.
5. Kalter, Pickar, and Lesowitz (1984) described a program for fifth and sixth grade children who met for one hour for eight weeks. Each session had a structure that included group story telling, role plays, skits, and creating a newspaper article about how children think and feel about divorce.
6. Stolberg and Cullen (1983) developed a prevention program for children eight to thirteen years of age. The intervention involved 12 weekly one-hour sessions which included impulse-control training, communication skill training, anger control skills, and relaxation techniques.
7. Yehl and Laz (1986) developed Rainbows for All Children, a time limited (12 weeks) support program for grades K-12. The program and materials address loss issues and

use books, activities and games to facilitate discussion around each week's theme.

### Community Based Interventions

Community based group interventions are sometimes sponsored by mental health centers, religious groups, courts, or divorce support groups (Hodges, 1984). Some of these are briefly described below.

1. Cantor and Drake (1983) developed a structural group program for divorced parents. The eight session topics are focused on parenting with the purpose to benefit the children by helping parents.
2. Kessler and Bostwick (1977) generated a one day workshop for adolescents using sentence completion exercises, film and assertive training.
3. Young (1980) described a court-mandated workshop for adolescents whose parents had filed for divorce. The workshop used film and discussion about the emotional reactions to parental divorce.
4. Magid (1977) described a six week program for children and parents using film vignettes showing common family themes.

A small body of controlled studies on the effectiveness of school-based group interventions has been conducted by Pedro-Carroll (1983), Kalter et al. (1984), and Stolberg and Garrison (1985). Emery (1988) states "that some empirical support has been received which indicates that children benefit from school based support groups, but concludes that more treatment-outcome research is sorely needed" (p. 116).



## Therapy

The literature on therapeutic techniques with children of divorce describes specific techniques or common issues which occur. Erikson (1963) and Axline (1969) propose play therapy as an effective technique for helping children to rework and gain mastery over stressful situations. Gardner (1976) uses a therapeutic technique of mutual storytelling in which a child tells a made up story with a moral. The therapist then tells the same story with a healthier adaptation and resolution. Hozman and Froiland (1976) developed a theory of therapy based on the assumption that children of divorce must grieve the loss of the parental relationship and using Kubler-Ross' (1969) concept of loss, they propose that children go through the same five stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980c) did not feel there was an observable progression of defined stages in the child's response to divorce which is at odds with Hozman and Froiland's (1976) grief theory. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980c) also felt the response of children was more related to the child's developmental stage, environment, and parent-child relationship. Given this orientation, Wallerstein and Kelly (1977) prescribe short term therapy with children using play therapy and direct discussion about divorce issues with the focus of treatment directed towards the parent(s).

To date, none of the above intervention techniques have been systematically studied using a control group so it is difficult to determine if any of the therapeutic techniques are helpful in a long term sense (Hodges, 1986).

Gardner (1976) describes common thematic issues for children of divorce which have been observed in therapeutic settings. Gardner's (1976) book Psychotherapy with Children of Divorce cites these common themes: (a) anger; (b) abandonment; (c) loss; (d) denial of feelings; (e) blame and guilt; (f) regression; (g) pseudomaturity; (h) reconciliation preoccupation; (i) self-esteem issues; and (j) sex role identification and sexual identity.

All therapies, regardless of theoretical orientation or specific issues have common goals. Hodges (1986) summarizes these as:

1. Increase recognition and acceptance of feeling. Acceptance of feelings helps a child to feel more accepted, increases self-esteem, and improves problem solving abilities.
2. Change acting out to talking out by helping the child to use verbal symbols for problem solving.
3. Improve problem solving abilities by helping the child to see that there are more alternative ways of perceiving the world and alternative ways of coping with problems.
4. Direct the child towards getting his or her needs met. Erickson (1963) noted that the family is designed to protect the child by providing nurturance and protection. When, for whatever reason the family or environment does not perform that function, the child may have to solve the problem normally solved by the family.
5. Increase discrimination abilities so that problem solving and getting needs met are more appropriate. For example if a child feels misunderstood, he or she needs to know there are people who are willing to listen.

### Expressive Arts Therapy

The use of creative arts activities are mentioned in the majority of the cited interventions or techniques, but there is no literature which

addresses its use specifically with children of divorce. This may be due in part to the premise that creative art therapies are adaptable to a wide variety of issues and therapeutic tasks (Rubin, 1984). Certainly the goals of expressive art therapies are conducive with the goals and objectives of support and therapeutic interventions.

An overview of art therapy literature demonstrates how it is currently viewed as a healing technique (Naumberg, 1958; Rubin, 1981) that can achieve a wide range of therapeutic objectives such as:

1. Enhance and expand the self-concept (Poore, 1977; Remotique Ano, 1980).
2. Enhance interpersonal skills (Neyer, 1976).
3. Extend cognitive orientation in inner and outer realities (Kreitler & Kreitler, 1978).
4. Provide "sublimation" via creative expression (Kramer, 1971).
5. Reinforce defenses (Lakovics et al., 1978).
6. Strengthen ego skills (Naumberg, 1958; Neyer, 1976).
7. Transform thoughts and feelings (Capacchione, 1979).

Mills and Crowley (1986) elaborate on the therapeutic objectives of art therapy by stating that its greatest advantage is in terms of its "living benefits." These living benefits include "the ongoing experience of releasing pent-up feelings as well as the simultaneous activation of inner resources and strengths" (Mills & Crowley, 1986, p. 166).

While the above paragraphs specifically address the benefits of art therapy, the techniques and objectives can be expanded to other forms of expressive communication, such as drama, movement,

music, and poetry. Rubin (1984) states that it is "unnatural to restrict children to any one creative modality" (p. 83). The premise of this project intends to incorporate all creative arts modalities and is not limited in scope by strictly the use of art therapy.

The use of creative art therapies with children of divorce would be beneficial because children naturally express their thoughts, feelings and interests through their art (Lowenfeld, 1982). Providing art media provides a communication avenue that is familiar and non-threatening to a child (Rubin, 1984). The process of transferring one's experiences to paper, clay, movement, or music allows distance and desensitization of conflicted inner feelings, fantasies, and fears (Rubin, 1984). Hammond (1981) states that the use of art activities provides structure, safety, as well as facilitating communication and the sharing of personal feelings and concerns.

The literature review reveals that the majority of programs or therapies utilize some aspect of creative arts when working with children. The activities described in the literature are done so in a manner that either limits their use to a specific age grouping, setting or theoretical framework. Some programs may not be readily available in all areas or are difficult to implement due to funding, space or trained staff. It is this author's hypothesis that there is a need for an intervention that: (a) targets a wide age range; (b) is specifically for divorce issues; (c) may be used in time limited support groups; (d) is applicable in therapeutic settings; and (e) meets the goals and objectives for resolving children's issue around parental divorce. Hopefully, school counselors, therapists, and others concerned about children's

adjustment after divorce will use the manual in a variety of modalities and settings. It is with this proposal that more children can readily receive the help they need.

## CHAPTER III

## METHOD

Subjects

Therapeutic Activities for Children of Divorce (see Appendix A) has been purchased by 125 teachers, counselors, therapists, and ministers. Most of those who have purchased the manual are working in the school environments, agencies, private practice, or residential treatment programs. A few activity manuals have been purchased by students or parents. From the order forms received, 20 clinicians or teachers were chosen randomly to evaluate the activity manual.

Materials

The evaluation form (see Appendix B) was designed to assess the effectiveness of the activities and the variety of settings, modalities, and time frames in which it is being used.

The evaluation form included six questions and a comment section. The first question asked if they had the opportunity to use the manual. The second question asked if they anticipate using the manual in the future. The third question asked for the type of modality and the time frame in which they are using the activities. Individual counseling, group therapy (open-ended), support group, time-limited group or other are the main areas to be identified. The fourth question asked if they use the activities exclusively with divorce issues and the fifth question asked if they plan the activities or use them spontaneously.

Question six is divided into four parts and offers a rating scale of one through five. Participants are asked to rate the activities in terms of: a) appropriateness for the needs and interests of children;

b) effectiveness in helping children clarify their feelings; c) effectiveness in helping children to achieve therapeutic goals; and d) effectiveness in helping children communicate their thoughts and feelings to others.

Question seven asks how the manual could be improved and provides for essay type answers. A final question provides for additional comments.

### Procedure

The sample of 20 randomly selected evaluators received a cover letter, evaluation form and a self-addressed stamped envelope (See Appendix B & C). Of those original 20 sent, only 5 were returned. In order to acquire a larger sample a second request was sent to the original 20 and a second sample was randomly chosen and the same information but a different return envelope was used. None of the original sample responded and 15 of the second sample returned their questionnaires.

## CHAPTER IV

## Results

The evaluations from 20 professionals who work with children indicated that the activity manual is useful and being implemented in a variety of settings, therapeutic modalities, and time-frames. Seventy-five percent of the evaluators indicated that the activities were very good to excellent in helping children to clarify and communicate their thoughts and feelings related to the family changes.

Data and percentages collected from the evaluations are presented in Tables 1 through 3.

Table 1

Modalities	Types of Use	Percentage
Total activity use		75%
	Group (Open-ended)	60%
	Individual work	55%
	Support Group	25%
	Time-limited work (9 wk., 12 wk.)	20%
	Other (type not indicated)	5%

Note. Manual was used in multiple modalities by participating professionals.

Table 1 represents the various modalities in which the manual was used. The largest percent of the evaluators (60%) used the activities in on-going group therapy. A slightly smaller percentage (55%) used the activities in individual work. Twenty-five percent of the professionals used the activities in support group work which may indicate usage within the school setting. Twenty percent indicated the



use of the activities for time-limited work. Perhaps the smaller percent of usage in the support group and time-limited modalities is indicative of the setting in which the evaluators are working. Many of the professionals used the manual in more than one modality which was encouraging as it was designed for that purpose.

Twenty-five percent of the evaluators had not used the manual, but ninety percent of those evaluators indicated they planned to use it in the future. Ten percent of the evaluators were undecided about using the manual.

Fifty percent of the evaluators did not use the activities exclusively with divorce issues, whereas thirty percent used the activities exclusively for divorce issues. Twenty percent of the evaluators were undecided about how they would use the activities or did not answer this question.

Table 2

Method of Use	Percentage
Planned	35%
Both planned and spontaneous	35%
Spontaneous	10%

Note. Twenty percent did not answer.

Table 2 indicates that more of the evaluators use the activities in a planned manner but an equal number use them in both a planned and spontaneous manner. The planned use of activities would indicate use in a time-limited support group modality in which each week has a theme or structure. Strictly spontaneous use of the

activities would require much familiarity with the activities and perhaps greater skill on the part of the professional.

Table 3 represents evaluations of the effectiveness of the activities and a breakdown in the number of responses, ratings, percentages, mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 3  
Effectiveness of Activities

N	Rating	%	M	SD
<b>6a. Appropriateness for needs of children</b>				
1	1	5%	3.6	2.03
0	2	0%		
1	3	5%		
2	4	10%		
12	5	60%		
4	N/A	20%		
<b>6b. Effective in clarifying feelings</b>				
1	1	5%	3.5	2.01
0	2	0%		
1	3	5%		
3	4	15%		
11	5	55%		
4	N/A	20%		
<b>6c. Helping to achieve goals</b>				
0	1	0%	3.4	2.13
1	2	5%		
1	3	5%		
1	4	5%		
12	5	60%		
5	N/A	25%		
<b>6d. Effective in helping children to communicate thoughts and feelings.</b>				
0	1	0%	3.6	1.98
1	2	5%		
1	3	5%		
2	4	10%		
12	5	60%		
4	N/A	20%		

Note. Rating scores were 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). See Appendix B for complete questionnaire.

An overwhelming percent (60%) of the evaluators rated the

activities as excellent. Overall the activities were rated to be very effective in meeting the needs of children, clarifying feelings, helping to achieve goals, and helping children to communicate thoughts and feelings.

## Discussion

The data collected from the questionnaires was valuable in indicating that the manual is applicable for a variety of therapeutic modalities and settings. This supports my hypothesis that an intervention is needed for children of divorce that can be adaptable for a variety of settings, ages and modalities. The effectiveness and adaptability of the manual supports the studies and statements of researchers and clinicians, such as: Wallerstein (1986), Cantor (1982), Benedek & Benedek (1979), Kalter (1984), and Emery (1988). Support services are greatly needed for all children of divorce whether the intervention is offered in the school setting, agencies or private practice. All of the researchers and advocates for children of divorce state that interventions are greatly lacking for this population.

Most of the available interventions cite the use of a structured curriculum or the use of activities which validates the use of creative arts activities in the manual. The use of creative arts activities in working with children is supported as an effective intervention by Rubin (1984), Lowenfeld (1982), and Hammond (1981). The utilization of creative arts activities is cited in all of the available intervention techniques or programs. The main benefit of using creative arts with any issue is that children naturally express themselves through their art, play or acting. Having a creative medium in which to express oneself allows the child psychic distance from painful experiences and facilitates safety in expression of feelings.

Recommendations for future work in the area of interventions for children of divorce would include more research on the types of

interventions that are most effective. J.S. Wallerstein (personal communication, Sept. 20, 1989) indicated the need to re-define therapeutic work with children and families of divorce from the present grief model and crisis intervention approach. Wallerstein theorizes that children of divorce need intermittent support and therapy throughout their lives as a parental divorce presents challenges and stressors which are ongoing. Wallerstein's theory lends credence to the value of producing an updated or additional activity manual which further addresses the needs of the young child through early adulthood.

Appendix A  
Manual

**Expressive Arts**  
**Manual for Children of Divorce**



THERAPEUTIC EXPERIENCES  
FOR  
CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

from

Kids in the Middle, Inc.

Compiled by Monica Moffet

8129 Delmar Blvd. - St. Louis, MO 63130 - 314-726-5588

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## PREFACE

This book is for professionals who acknowledge that parental divorce can deeply affect children.

It is not designed to provide theoretical or research information, but rather to give the therapist the tools to help children achieve resolution on a variety of divorce related issues. It is designed to help those therapists who are knowledgeable about issues faced by children of divorce by offering them creative activities to supplement verbal therapy or support.

This manual is a product of collaboration by the therapists at Kids In the Middle, Inc., with much insight gained from the children, who have taught us what they have needed in order to heal.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many of the activities in this manual were designed by myself or by other therapists at Kids In the Middle. A small number of the activities were developed by other professionals. The sources are credited on each activity.

A very special thanks is given to the "Rainbow For All Children" school program which provided much insight and direction for this manual.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks to the Kids In the Middle staff, who dance, draw, laugh, and hug together. It is our special love energy that comes from our hearts, which we share with our children, that makes our work so effective, rewarding, and lots of fun.

I wish to acknowledge Pet Incorporated Community Support Foundation and Southwestern Bell Telephone for the underwriting of this project.

## INTRODUCTION

Eleven years ago, Kids In the Middle was the nation's first agency to provide children of divorce a counseling service that concentrated solely on meeting their psychological needs, as related to the family changes. It has taken the last decade for society, parents, and professionals to break through their denial in thinking kids are flexible and will bounce back from a parental divorce. Presently there is greater recognition that divorce and ongoing parental conflict do have an impact on a child's emotional development.

Although research in the field is still in its infancy, evidence indicates a correlation between parental divorce and childhood depression, suicide, chemical dependency, poor school performance, and various acting out behaviors.

At Kids In the Middle, we have had the luxury of working exclusively with divorce issues, which has allowed us to fine-tune those methods that are most effective in working with children of divorce. It is the product of our concentrated efforts and creativity that we would like to share with the reader. We recognize that there are many skilled practitioners who are doing wonderful work with children of divorce. We also know that not everyone has the time or the creative energies to develop games and activities to supplement their theoretical knowledge. It is with those practitioners in mind that this manual is offered.

In working with children, the expectation that they will readily communicate and identify their feelings is unrealistic. As their guides, we need to offer them alternative avenues of communication that allow

them some distancing from their intense feelings. The avenues of drawing, playing, and acting are familiar to all children and just as poignant as verbalizations. By offering familiar media, it allows children to clarify, identify, and express their feelings in ways that are enjoyable and non-threatening, yet effective.



## USING THE MANUAL

The following activities have been used at Kids In the Middle in our ongoing therapy groups. Each group consists of three to five children, of approximately the same age. Generally children are in their group for six to nine months.

The group setting is most beneficial for receiving peer validation and reducing feelings of guilt and shame. Should you not have the advantage of using small, ongoing group therapy, this manual could be applicable to individual work or offered for a time limited group.

Many of the activities have the potential of touching unconscious levels and for that reason, it is essential that facilitators be trained clinicians in order to process the material that evolves.

The following activities are grouped under specific themes or issues that frequently come up for children of divorce. Each task is designed to facilitate expression of feelings in that area. Although the themes are in a sequential type of order, we realize that children do not make progress sequentially, but rather move forward and backward in the process of ongoing therapy. However, the manual's activities could be used sequentially in time-limited groups.

Goals and a rationale for each theme are given to provide the facilitator with direction and some theoretical background. Each theme then has activities which are appropriate for three age groupings: (a) young children aged 3 to 8, (b) latency aged children 8 to 12, and (c) adolescents. A section is also devoted to processing each activity and possible areas for discussion. Materials needed for each activity are described. Usually these are minimal, but in some

instances it requires the facilitator to make game cards or a playing board. Directions for doing these are given in the Appendix.

Construction does not need to be elaborate.

The Appendix includes the sample questions, diagrams and topics for many of the activities described.

### SELF-ESTEEM

#### A. Rationale:

The family unit provides a child with protection, identity, and the fulfillment of their emotional and physical needs. When this unit is shattered, the child's identity and security is badly shaken. Many children internalize the marital split as rejection of themselves. The crisis of the situation is further compounded as the parents become unavailable for the child due to the numerous emotional, economic, and social adjustments they are required to make.

Rebuilding the child's self-esteem is an ongoing process throughout the therapy. The child needs to be validated for his or her uniqueness and strengths and given support in individuating from the family crisis. The child also needs to develop a belief in his or her ability to cope with not only the present but future crises and changes.

The following activities are helpful for joining and developing a sense of belonging as well as self-esteem building.

#### B. Goals:

To identify one's own uniqueness.

To build group cohesiveness.

To establish trust.

To discover similarities and differences between self and others.

To build self-esteem.

Activity: I am important...

Age Levels: 3-12 years

Directions: Each child looks into a mirror and talks about what makes him or her special and loveable, or what they do that is important and different. If this is difficult for some, they can simply say "I am important."



Process: Discuss each child's effort in terms of sincerity and difficulty in doing the activity. Talk about how we forget to acknowledge ourselves in a positive way and often rely upon others to do it for us. Encourage the children to use self- affirmations as a gift to themselves.

Materials: Handheld mirror.

Source: Streett, Lee - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Unique Me****Age Levels: 3-12 years**

**Directions:** Children will choose a partner to work with and trace each other's body outline on large mural paper with marker. Each child will fill in the details of his or her outline, i.e. hair, facial features, clothes, descriptive words. The figures may be cut out and displayed.



**Process:** Discussion should focus on differences and similarities, identification of certain characteristics, and uniqueness of each one. Group leader should be aware of attempts to disfigure or dramatic change from reality and explore that perception.

**Materials:** Mural paper roll - 36" wide.

Markers.

Construction paper (optional).

Scissors.

Glue (optional).

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids in the Middle

### Activity: Alike/Unlike Chart

Age Levels: 3-12 years

**Directions:** Group leader divides a large sheet of paper with the headings of alike/unlike. With group input, identification is made of all the unifying characteristics of the group members, i.e. all boys, brown eyes, divorced parents. Differences are also written on the other side, such as different hobbies, hair color.

**Variation:** Younger children can stand up or raise their hands when leader calls out characteristics which apply to them.

<b>Alike</b>	<b>Unlike</b>
5th grade Parents divorced Visit a parent tennis shoes	eye color food choices step-parents hobbies

**Process:** Focus discussion on how we sometimes feel different from others, especially before getting to know them. Usually we have more in common with others than we realize, yet we are all unique and different. This is a good ice breaker activity and promotes group cohesiveness.

**Materials:** Poster paper.  
Marker.

**Source:** Stock, Roger - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Recipe For Me****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Directions:** Children are asked to write a recipe that describes themselves and to give the proportion of "ingredients"/ characteristics. Motivate by using a brief description, i.e. "I think I have 2 cups of caring, 1 cup of understanding, 1 tbl. sadness, etc."

**Variation:** The children could also describe what they need for their happiness, i.e. no fighting, love, etc.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>"Me"</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2 cups confusion mixed with 1 cup sadness.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Add happy times and 4 cups love. Mix carefully.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bake in a warm oven. Serves a family of 3.</b></p>
--

**Process:** Most children use this activity to make positive affirmations which need to be validated. They are also given the impetus to identify personal characteristics that are not readily acknowledged.

**Materials:** Paper or index cards.  
Markers or pencils.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

## II. FEELINGS

A. Rationale: When parents divorce, children experience intense, conflicting and painful feelings, and they are unsure of their coping abilities. Their parents are often immersed in their own shock and grief and may be emotionally unavailable to attend to their children's feelings. Children may also be unaccustomed to acknowledging their feelings and feel so over whelmed by them that they need assistance in identifying and clarifying them. When children's feelings are validated and expressed they are less likely to be reflected in symptomatic behaviors.

B. Goals:

To identify and develop a feeling vocabulary.

To facilitate appropriate expression of feelings.

To receive peer validation for feelings.

To clarify feelings.

To understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

To learn the importance of acknowledging feelings.





**Activity: Telephone Feelings****Age Levels: 3-8 years**

**Directions:** The counselor models how different feelings may sound in tone of voice and topics by calling members on toy telephones and being a feeling. "This is excited calling..." Older children may be able to "call up" other peers after watching counselors. This is effective to do while playing house or as a check-in activity.



**Process:** The children increase their vocabulary of feelings and are allowed to experiment with a variety of feeling states to gain recognition and validation. They also learn congruency between stated feeling and content.

**Materials:** Toy telephones (2).

**Source:** Korenblat, Melissa - Kids In the Middle

### Activity: Spaghetti Feelings

Age Levels: 3-8 years

**Directions:** After discussing how feelings of confusion or conflicting feelings sometimes feel like tangled spaghetti inside of us, the leader displays a jar of colored spaghetti. Talk about what feelings each color might be and how they got mixed together. Children may touch and eat various "feelings."

**Variation:** Feeling Hide & Seek. The facilitator hides cards around the room which depict feeling faces or words. Candy may be attached to the cards. The children "seek" the feelings and attach the cards with tape to their body where they feel that emotion, i.e. love on their hearts, mad on their stomach area.



**Process:** Discussion centers around how feelings can get all mixed up but by looking at them one by one, or color by color, they don't seem so confusing. Complex feelings like bored or frustrated can be pulled apart to see what kinds of feelings are involved. Children may eat the noodles and in doing gain insight into owning their feelings.

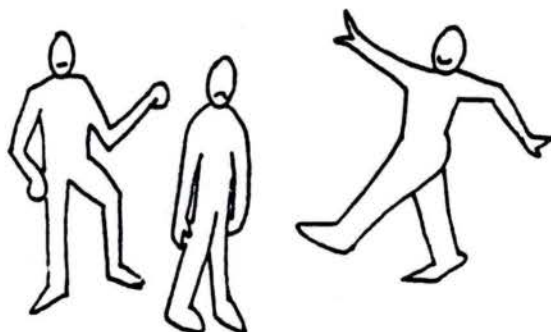
**Materials:** Leader applies food coloring to separate bowls of cooked spaghetti. The colored spaghetti is mixed together and placed in a large jar with a lid and kept refrigerated when not in use. A variety of shaped pastas can also be used to further illustrate different feeling states.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Feeling Dance/Walk****Age Levels: 3-12 years**

**Directions:** Individually or as a group, children are instructed to dance or walk as if they were angry, sad, happy, lonely, etc. Each child's walk or body movement could also represent various feeling states. The other group members would then guess the feeling.

**Variation:** Have members cover their faces with a mask, piece of poster board, or bag and express a feeling through body movement. The other group members guess the feeling.



**Process:** Focus discussion on other ways that feelings are conveyed besides words. Discuss the confusion felt when non-verbals don't match the feelings verbally expressed.

**Materials:** Poster board or masks if using variation.

**Source:** Harris, Deborah R. - Kids In the Middle

Activity: Feeling Poker

Age Levels: 8-12 years

**Directions:** Group leader will construct playing cards and acquire poker chips. (See sample questions in Manual Appendix). The children draw a card from the deck and read the question. They may choose to answer truthfully or bluff with a fictitious answer. The others "bet" whether it was true or false by placing their chips on either the true or false area. If the child fooled everyone by the incorrect bets, they collect those chips. If the bets were correct, members regain their chips.



**Process:** Score is kept by the number of chips accumulated. This game allows distance in discussing sensitive issues while providing fun in doing so. It also helps members demonstrate how well they know each other, and provides an avenue for appropriate expression of feelings.

**Materials:** Playing cards with questions written on them (see Appendix).

Poker chips.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Feeling Charades****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Directions:** Various family situations are written on slips of paper and each child draws one from a container (see Manual Appendix). Each child then acts out the situation without words and members guess what is happening.

**Variation:** Each child may ask other members to play other people, and direct their actions.



**Process:** Discussion should focus on the commonality of experiences and emotional content conveyed. Each child's role in the situation can be explored for expansion, validation, and appropriateness.

**Materials:** Situations written on slips of paper (see Appendix).

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

### Activity: Where Do You Keep Your Feelings?

Age Levels: 8 years & up

Directions: Members are given a human figure outline on which they label or draw what feelings are felt or stored in various areas of their bodies: i.e., fear in stomach or knees, love in the heart.



Process: Discuss what happens in our bodies when feelings are stored and identify physical problems that can occur; i.e. stomachaches, headaches, crying, hitting, etc. Explore appropriate ways of letting feelings out and fears around doing so.

Materials: Pre-printed sheet of human figure outline (see Appendix).

Markers.

Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

Activity: Masks (inside/outside feelings)

Age Levels: 3-12 years

Directions: After a brief discussion of feelings that are easy to show others and how we sometimes hide what we are feeling, children are given a paper plate to represent their outside and inside feelings. On one side they make a face that they often show to others, and on the other side they make what they really feel on the inside.

Variation: These masks may also be made into a mobile or attached to sticks.



Outside



Inside

Process: Discuss our fears of showing others how we feel on the inside and explore expectations of what would occur if those inside feelings were known. Explore the reality of conflicting feelings and validate the confusion they instill. Discuss the message we receive about showing the so-called negative feelings and educate on the normality of all feelings.

Materials: Paper plates.

Markers.

Popsicle sticks (optional).

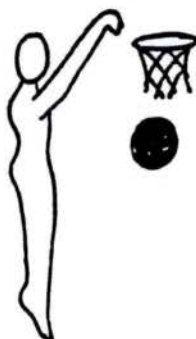


Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Feeling Basketball****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Direction:** Each child answers a question about situations or feelings and then takes his or her turn shooting a basket. Points are kept for questions answered and baskets made. The facilitator may ask the question or the children may ask each other. Question cards from Feeling Poker may be used.

**Variation:** This can also be done with soccer or baseball.



**Process:** The facilitator may offer short reflective or reframing statements to the child's answer.

**Materials:** Nerf basketball and net.

Question cards (see Appendix on Feeling Poker).

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids in the Middle

## Activity: Chart of Feelings

Age Levels: 8-12 years

Directions: This activity illustrates the concept that feelings are on a continuum. Many children tend to polarize; seeing emotions as black or white and good or bad. These charts allow them to see the many degrees between opposite feelings and that their feelings have wide variations.

Using a chalkboard or poster board, give each child a horizontal column heading. He or she will then identify 1-2 people of emotional significance who are listed on the opposite side. The left side of the chart represents negative feelings while the right represents positive feelings. The children indicate and mark where they are that week on the feeling continuum.

	1	Awful	O.K.	Good	Great	Fantastic	10
John			X				Step-dad
Bill		X			X		Mom Step-dad
Tom						X	Dad

Process: Notice changes in feelings or lack of changes and reflect that back to each child. Explore what has occurred to contribute to the feeling change.

Materials: Chalkboard or poster board.

Source: Stock, Roger - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: My Music - Our Lines****Age Levels: 12 & up**

**Directions:** Ask children to bring a tape of their favorite music. Place mural size paper on the walls and provide markers. As each child's music is played, all members will make lines or images to represent the emotive message of the musical rhythms. Allow five minutes for each selection.



**Process:** Focus discussion on how each member heard and felt the music in different ways, what types of music stimulated clearer visual images, and what it was like to "see" music. Notice if members drew in each other's space and ask how they felt about doing so. Notice how different types of music created different feelings. Explore each child's selection of music and what he or she likes about it.

**Materials:** Mural size paper.

Markers.

Tape player.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

### III. FAMILY CHANGES

#### A. Rationale:

The numerous changes that occur in a family when there is a divorce require many emotional, financial and social adjustments. The children need an opportunity to tell and retell their story in a supportive environment. Having this opportunity helps to desensitize them to the emotional intensity of the crisis by seeing the reactions of other children and being listened to. By receiving peer validation and seeing others who are in different stages of acceptance, they can come to realize that changes require time for adjustment and that confusion is natural.

#### B. Goals:

To have a chance to tell his or her story.

To develop divorce terminology and understanding.

To clarify and re-establish roles.

To gain a sense of mastery over changes.

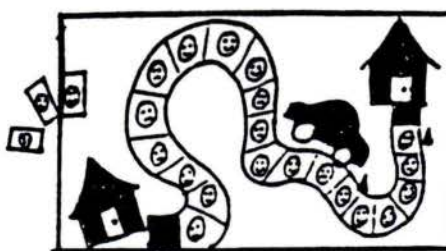
To develop coping skills for adapting to change.

To identify positive aspects of change.

**Activity: Mom's House to Dad's House Game****Age Levels: 3-8 years**

**Directions:** The therapist will need to construct a playing board and cards (see Appendix). The game is played by the children throwing dice and moving around the board. Upon landing in a space, they will take a smiley or sad face card as indicated and answer the question to receive a point or a treat. The therapist will need to read the questions which center around the theme of transitions and mastery. The question playing cards can be used with other games if desired.

**Variation:** The two houses can be represented by furniture, pillows or doll houses and the children can pretend to go from house to house. The same game questions (see Appendix) could be asked and answered after a move.



**Process:** This game allows children a sense of control and coping with transitions. It also helps them to identify what they need in order to alleviate difficulties in transitions. The therapist will take an active role in helping the children to provide coping responses.

**Materials:** Game Board (see Appendix).

Playing cards (see Appendix).

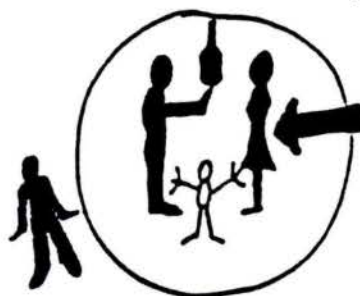
Dice and marker pieces.

Treats if used.

**Source:** Harris, Deborah R. - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Family Silhouettes****Age Levels: 3 years and up**

**Directions:** Begin by instructing the children to draw a large circle to represent their world. Then ask them to draw themselves in their world and ask where they want to place themselves and how big they feel. The counselor then presents a variety of paper family figures, which need to be prepared beforehand (see Appendix). The children are instructed to choose figures of those people who are considered part of their world. They will then arrange the figures around themselves according to emotional proximity. Figures are glued into place.



**Process:** Notice and discuss the size, location and direction of each child as well as other figures. Discussion centers around their perception of their changing world. Some figures may be felt to no longer be a part of the child's world, while others have become closer. Explore whether each child's world is a fantasy creation or realistic.

**Materials:** Construction paper, 12 x 18".

Glue.



Markers.

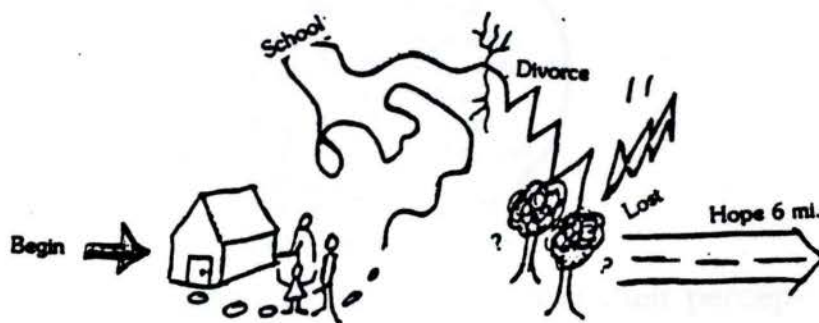
Family figures of black construction paper (see Appendix).

Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

### Activity: Roadmap of Your Life

Age Levels: 8 years & up

**Directions:** On large sheets of paper, the children will draw a map of their lives. Motivate by talking about the types of roads we travel upon (bumpy, crooked, deadends, 4 lanes) and how they compare to times in our lives. Instruct them to mark points of interest with markers along the way. Signs could be made indicating the future.



**Process:** Discuss the emotive feeling of the lines and the highlights or milestones depicted. Have the negatives or positives dominated the scenario? Is the future depicted and how?

**Materials:** Large paper.

Markers.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

Activity: Past/Present/Future (drawing)

Age Levels: 8 years & up

Directions: Children are instructed to draw two large overlapping circles. In the left circle, they are to draw or write symbols which represent the past. The interlocking space is for the present and the right represents the future. The directions could be specifically for the family or perceptions of self.



Process: Process the drawings by talking about their perceptions and time frames given. Are their depictions of the future realistic or wishful? Assess and encourage what the children need to do to make it realistic. Validate each child's progress made from the past to the present. This activity may be repeated throughout each child's therapy and used as a review or measurement of changed perceptions.

Materials: Paper, 12 x 18".

Markers.

Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

Activity: My Family Is Like...(poem)

Age Levels: 10 years & up

Directions: The children are given suggested topics for writing a poem or descriptive paragraph (see Appendix). For those children who don't enjoy writing, they may fill in with one descriptive word or a drawing.

**My Family Is Like...**

**Messy**

**Hard to Understand**

**Divorced**

Process: Comment on the emotional content conveyed by the words.

Materials: Paper.

Pen (see Appendix).

Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Family Stories****Age Levels: 8 years & up**

**Directions:** This is a group story telling or writing activity that begins by the facilitator starting or writing about a family. It begins with the phrase "once upon a time" and could be a scenario of the parents telling the children of the divorce, visitation scenes, parental fighting, remarriage, etc. Each member takes a turn and has three minutes to add to the story. The facilitator directs the story content on his or her turn and ends the story with some type of resolution. The story is then read to the group if it was written.

**Example****"Divorce Doesn't Have to be Terrible"**

Once upon a time there was a boy named Miles who lived in a doghouse high on a mountaintop. He was living there while his parents' divorce was becoming final. Don't ask me why he was living in a doghouse; people do funny things when there are family changes (therapist).

Well one day he came down but he heard his parents arguing from a mile away, so he darted up the mountain to his doghouse (child).

But he didn't get up there in time and when he got there, his Mom and Dad were mad. They said he couldn't go down. So he decided not to eat ever again (child).

His parents got their divorce and lived terribly ever after (child).

Finally, Miles came to his senses and realized that if his parents wanted to live terribly, that was their business. He could choose to live good. So he fixed up his doghouse and invited all his friends over to play. They played every day. Eventually Mom started to play too and moved her house next to the doghouse. Dad stopped by from time to time. They all started to talk about their feelings and to feel better. Most important, they learned to love again (therapist).

- Process:** Each child colors the story by his or her own perceptions.  
Discuss each child's contribution as though he or she were relating from an actual experience, fear, or fantasy.
- Materials:** Paper and pencil, if written.
- Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

#### IV. ANGER

##### A. Rationale:

Children of divorce are deeply hurt by the loss of the ideal family and implications of future changes. The hurt leads to angry feelings which are difficult to express for fear of loss of approval or loss of contact with either parent.

Oftentimes a child feels his or her anger is inappropriate or that it does not make sense which further convolutes its expression but does not lessen the reality of the angry feelings. Children need to know the importance of expressing their angry feelings and to learn the implications of unresolved anger (depression, somatic complaints, acting out, etc.). They need permission to be angry with those they love and help in finding appropriate ways to express their anger and hurt.

##### B. Goals:

To identify anger.

To own one's anger.

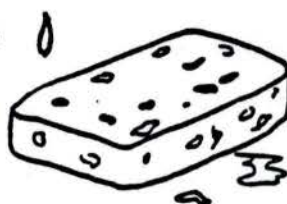
To learn appropriate expression of anger.

To resolve feelings of hurt.

To receive peer validation.

**Activity: Analogy of Anger/Angry Sponge****Age Levels: 3-12 years**

**Directions:** Begin by talking about anger and how we feel by holding it in. Give each child a dry sponge to represent his or her body. The children will then gradually add water to the sponge while talking about what makes them angry. Have the children make observations about what is happening to the sponge.



**Process:** Relate how anger is like the water and can fill us up and spill out. Discuss the spilling out in terms of inappropriate behavior. Relate ways of addressing each drop of water (anger felt) before the saturation point is reached. Discuss how the sponge becomes ineffective when saturated and relate that effect to ourselves.

**Materials:** Sponges.  
Water.  
Eyedropper.  
Bow.

**Source:** Korenblat, Melissa -Kids In the Middle



Activity: Anger Oath

Age Levels: 3-8 years

**Directions:** Begin by discussing typical angry responses. A "bobo" doll may then be offered which the children may punch. Try to elicit from them specific people or situations that generate their angry feelings. When members are calm, tell them they will learn some new ways of showing anger so that feelings, people, and things do not get hurt. Have the children take an oath proclaiming their right to get mad, but promising to do so appropriately. Then have the group think of some good ways to let out their anger, i.e. punch a pillow, stomp their feet, talk about it, tear up paper, run, etc. Recall each member's previous reason for becoming mad. Role model an appropriate suggested response. For example: "Johnny, the next time your Mom ignores you, you can..." Have the group practice each of the appropriate anger responses and repeat the oath.



**Process:** This activity gets the children physically involved in exploring, trying out, and practicing appropriate expressions of anger. It also helps them to identify and

clarify what causes their anger. By experiencing the expression of anger as being manageable and acceptable, hopefully they will feel comfortable in expressing it appropriately.

**Materials:** Inflatable punching object.

**Source:** Korenblat, Melissa - Kids In the Middle

## V. FEARS/MISCONCEPTIONS

### A. Rationale:

Often when there is a family crisis, children do not receive adequate information or they are given incorrect or biased information. When they lack the facts they will fill in the pieces with what may be misconceptions. Often these misconceptions are worse than the reality. If children can be helped to clarify their worries and get them out in the open the fears lose their power.

There are many issues around a child's security and needs that are threatened when there is a marital breakup. It is natural for him or her to have fears about the unknown future, continued relationship with either parent, money, and stability. Only by sharing these fears with others can the child begin to resolve and understand them.

### B. Goals:

To identify fears and verbalize them.

To separate real fears from imagined.

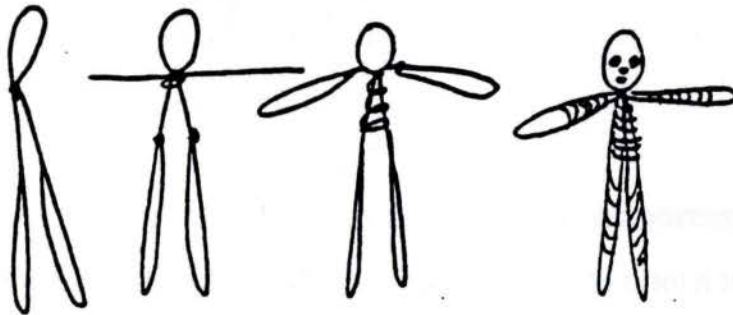
To cope with fear and worry by distancing and desensitization.

To separate child fears from adult worries.

To receive peer validation.

**Activity: Worry Dolls****Age Levels: 6-12 years**

**Directions:** After a brief discussion of all the things we worry about, explore how some people tell their worries to other things, i.e. dolls, pets, etc. Show an example of a worry doll and explain how they will make one that they can tell their troubles to. Help them to bend pipe cleaners into a human shape. They may decorate their dolls with scrap felt or wrap with embroidery thread. The dolls are then given a name.



**Process:** Explore various times and situations when using the doll might be helpful. Educate that by getting our worries out in the open they no longer occupy so much of our time. Encourage each child's expression of their worries and validate their fears.

**Materials:** Pipe cleaners.

Embroidery thread or yarn.

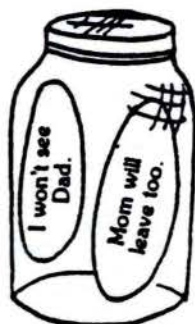
Scissors, glue.

Scrap material.

**Source:** Korenblat, Melissa - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Funeral For Fears****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Directions:** The children conduct a funeral for fears, where they say goodbye to them and put them to rest. Have the children draw or write a fear they are ready to give up on an oblong shape of paper. Each child delivers a eulogy for his or her fear and they are placed in a container which then may be buried.



**Process:** Encourage the children to express the importance of their fear to them, if and what they will miss about it, and why it is no longer needed. Discuss how rituals help us to achieve closure.

**Materials:** Oblong shape of construction paper.

Box or jar.

Markers.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Dear Debbie, the Divorce Columnist****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Directions:** Children are given pads of paper to write a letter asking for advice from "Debbie, the Divorce Columnist." They then pass their letters to someone in the group (or to their left). This person replies to their question in writing. Letters are returned and read to the group.

**Variation:** Letters may be placed in a container and chosen by members to then answer in writing.



**Process:** Validate appropriate responses and support given. Offer additional suggestions when needed.

**Materials:** Paper note pads.

Pencils.

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

## VI. RE-DEFINING FAMILY

### A. Rationale:

The two-parent nuclear family is every child's ideal family unit. When the family nucleus changes, children have difficulty recognizing they still have a family because it no longer fits the ideal or myth of the "perfect family."

During the ensuing disequilibrium, family members' roles may become confused and less defined. Children need assistance in maintaining their appropriate roles and to feel a sense of belonging amidst the changes. They also need assurance and education as to what constitutes a family. It is important to stress the quality of the family relationships rather than the quantity of family members.

### B. Goals:

To talk about different family structures.

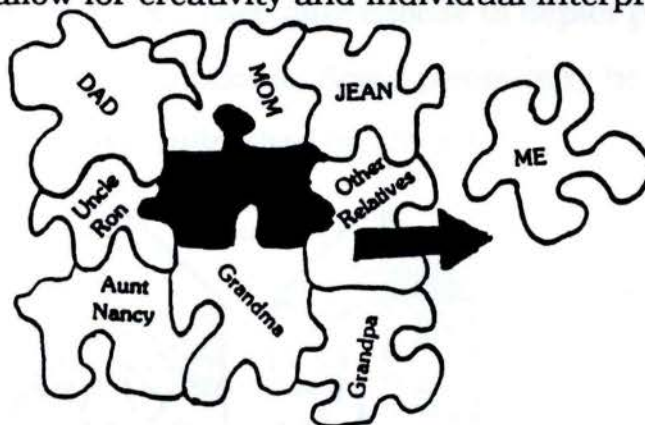
To re-establish and define what a family is.

To explore the child's place within the family.

To expand roles and relinquish "little man or woman" roles.

**Activity: Family Puzzle****Age Levels: 8-12 years**

**Directions:** Briefly compare families to being like a puzzle and give examples, i.e. confusing, sometimes fitting together, sometimes not, pieces missing, etc. Give the children construction paper and instruct them to create a puzzle of their family. Keep the instructions brief to allow for creativity and individual interpretation.



**Process:** Discuss the number of puzzle pieces and family members who are depicted. Are family members missing? Have the children included themselves and what is their location? Is the puzzle very complex?

**Materials:** Construction paper.

Markers.

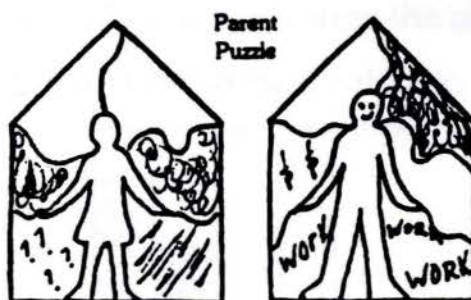
**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle



### Activity: Parent Puzzle

Age Levels: 8-12

**Directions:** Children are given the worksheet (see Appendix) with an explanation that each parent has a separate house and different things that are important to them and that fill up their lives. In the spaces of the puzzle pieces, the children draw or write in those parts of their parents' lives. They may choose to depict people, places, things or emotions. Some pieces may be blank if some parts are unfinished or absent.



**Process:** Note and discuss the emotions conveyed about each parental home. Is there a marked difference between the two? Have the children included themselves in one or both homes? Is the quality of life conveyed?

**Materials:** Parent Puzzle outline sheet (see Appendix).

Markers.

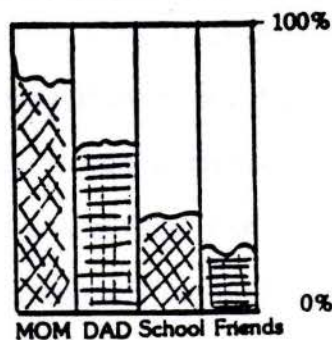
**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: I Belong Chart**

**Age Levels: 8 years & up**

**Directions:** Motivate the members by discussing feelings of belonging. Relate how changing families and new situations effect our security and sense of belonging.

Have the children draw adjacent vertical columns to represent their important physical environments, i.e. Mom's house, Dad's house, school, friends' houses, etc. The top of the columns can be marked 100%. The children will fill in with markers the amount of belonging that is felt in each column.



**Process:** Discuss the different proportions and what contributes to those feelings in each area. Talk about what they would need or could do to increase small proportions.

**Materials:** Paper

Markers.

**Source:** Yehl, Suzy - "Rainbows For All Children" Program

## VII. SPLIT LOYALTIES/STEP-FAMILIES

## A. Rationale:

When conflict continues between the parents or when new spouses are added, the child has the task of sorting out his or her feelings from the adults' feelings and influences. Many times the children are given the message that it is not okay to like a parent or step-parent, or that their love should be divided. Children need assistance in sorting out their true feelings and guidance in dealing with a parent who attempts to influence their feelings.

When parents remarry, children experience confusion over roles and expectations. They expect step-families to be like a biological family in which everyone has had years to adjust to each other. Therefore, comparisons are made, while at the same time many fears and false expectations are experienced. Talking about these frustrations and confusions helps to clarify the situation

## B. Goals:

To clarify fears and misconceptions.

To explore role expectations.

To work through split loyalties and expand relationships.

To develop acceptance and realistic expectations.

**Activity: Who's In Your Heart****Age Levels: 3-12 years**

**Directions:** Motivate by talking about how our hearts sometimes feel torn when families change. Give the children a large paper heart and offer a variety of penny candy from which they may choose to fill up their heart. Notice types and quantity of candy chosen. Have them put this heart aside and offer another paper heart with which they repeat the process. Talk about the difference or the sameness of their choices and relate that to how our feelings can change. For example, one day we may want a lot of peppermint and get too much, so the next day we have chocolate. So even if we don't like it one day, there is always room in our hearts for different types. Now give the children a piece of paper on which to draw their parents. Help them to cut out the parent figures. Give them another paper heart and ask them to place and fit their parents in their heart and glue.

**Variation:** Children can simply draw a large heart and fill it in with family figures. Motivate by asking who has the biggest space, who is on the edge, who would like to have a larger space, etc.



**Process:** Explore throughout the activity each child's perception of who can be in his or her heart and why. Create analogies when using the candy to help each child understand that feelings are never fixed and are always changing. Explain that children of divorce often feel like their hearts are torn or that there is no longer enough room for both Mom and Dad. Hopefully this activity will illustrate that by making choices and adjusting the pieces, our hearts and love remain the same.

**Materials:** Large paper heart cutouts (3 per child).  
Variety of penny candy.  
Glue, scissors, markers.

**Source:** Korenblat, Melissa - Kids In the Middle

## VIII. COPING

## A. Rationale:

A divorce brings a crisis to the family and in its wake are other future crises. The necessary adjustments require flexibility, time and numerous coping tools. The self-esteem and coping abilities of children are threatened when parents divorce. They are required to adapt to changes, intense and conflicted feelings, and multiple losses. Because self-esteem is linked to one's belief that they are capable of coping with challenges, children of divorce benefit greatly in learning new coping skills which in turn builds their self-esteem.

We can facilitate this process by teaching each child specific skills for appropriate expression of their feelings, assertive communication, reality testing, problem solving, and stress management techniques.

## B. Goals:

To identify and verbalize feelings without guilt.

To develop assertive expression of feelings.

To learn problem solving skills.

To disengage from adult conflicts.

To learn assertive communication skills.

To seek and ask for support.

**Activity: Visitation Skit****Age Levels: 8-12**

**Directions:** Each child chooses a title from a container. The titles represent various themes or situations encountered in visiting the non-custodial parent or step-family (see Appendix). Each child acts out the title and members either guess what the situation is or participate in the skit.

**Variation:** Short stories or drawings could be elicited for each title.



**Process:** Discuss the commonly felt feelings for each situation. Educate on the normality of feeling uncertain in new situations when roles have not been defined. Talk about how parents' expectations can influence their feelings.

**Materials:** Topic titles written on paper (see Appendix).

**Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

Activity: Communication Model

Age Levels: 8 years & up

Directions: Assertive communications skills are life skills and children need to know how to express themselves in a non-aggressive manner. In taking responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings, children will find that others will be more receptive to meeting their needs. We have found that children readily learn and use this technique, especially when it is modeled and practiced in the group. Posters or handouts may be made available as children learn the steps.

An example: "Dad, when you talk bad about Mom I feel mad. Because I still love her and I think you want me to feel the way you do. So I would like it if you would not do that around me."

Process:

**When you...**(state specific behaviors)

**I feel...**(feeling)

**Because I think...**(thought causing the feeling)

**And I would like...**(need, want, request)

Materials: Poster of the communication model.

Source: Rosenberg, Marshall - Center For Non-violent Communications, Bordeaux, TX

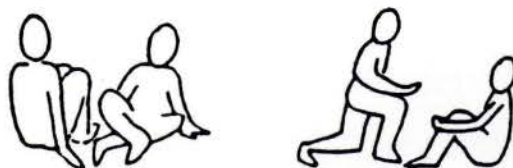


**Activity: Situations & Solution Game****Age Levels: 8 years & up**

**Directions:** The children draw cards which describe various situations that they may experience and find difficult to handle (see Appendix for sample situational cards). Each member offers a solution or appropriate coping strategy. Members then vote on which response seems most appropriate. The member giving the best solution is given a point.

**Variation A:** Each child has a folder with pockets. Have each child describe a problem that has been difficult for him or her. Members then write on pads of paper their helpful suggestions which are read, collected and kept by each child in his or her folder for future reference.

**Variation B:** The group is divided into two teams. Both teams listen as the leader reads a situation aloud. Each team discusses and writes as many solutions as they can think of. After five minutes, the team with the most responses shares their ideas first. Then the other team presents.



**Process:** Each child's response will reflect his or her individual coping styles (aggressive, passive, blaming, assertive,

or denial) which can be reflected back to the child.

Discuss pros and cons of each response and why the one chosen was the best solution.

**Materials:** Cards describing situations (see Appendix).

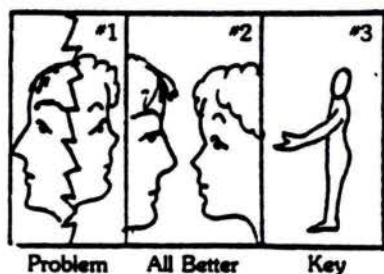
Pencil and paper, if written.

Folders, if written variation is used.

**Source:** Yehl, Suzy - "Rainbows For All Children" program.  
Adapted from "A Way to Go" game.

**Activity: The Problem - "All Better"****Age Levels: 8-16 years**

**Directions:** Have the children divide their paper into thirds vertically and number the spaces. In #1 they draw "the problem." In #2 they draw how it would look if it were "all better." Then in #3, they draw what it would take for #1 to be like #2; or what is the key to a change.



**Process:** This activity allows children to see the process of problem solving and to come up with a solution. Usually they are very perceptive in identifying the problem, but sometimes misguided or unrealistic in determining what is needed for a change. This illustration opens the avenue for discussing how each child perceives the problem and what he or she can do to bring about a change. It also motivates them to take responsibility for their part in effecting a change. This activity can also be used intermittently as a review of progress and changed perceptions.

**Materials:** 12 x 18" paper.

Markers.

Pencils.

Source: Mills, Joyce C. (1986). Therapeutic metaphors for children and the child within. New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc.

**Activity: Conflict Sandwich****Age Levels: 8-16 years**

**Directions:** Discuss how it feels to be caught in the middle of parental conflict and the difficulty in getting out of that situation. If there is a therapist and co-therapist, they will be role-playing the parents. Two group members could also act as the parents. Choose individual group members to play the child. The "adults" form their arms around the "child" who is in the middle. The "adults" then role-play various situations which place the child in their conflict, i.e. talking negatively about each other, requesting messages to be sent, attempts to prove who is to blame, etc. The child then responds with words to get himself or herself released. The words must be assertive and include a feeling statement. Each child has a turn and the therapists may adapt the role-play to a situation that is occurring in that child's life.



**Process:** Investigate with each child the feelings he or she experienced while in the middle situation, the motivation for removing himself/herself and the difficulty in doing so

assertively.

Materials: None.

Source: Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

## IX. REACHING OUT/TERMINATIONS

### A. Rationale:

As children achieve acceptance and closure on their emotional traumas, they can assist others in their journey. By sharing of themselves they begin to appreciate the self-healing that has occurred and how that sharing helps others to heal.

Children in all different stages of this healing process can be very beneficial for each other. Those who are experiencing the initial crisis can gain from talking with those who are further along in the process and achieving acceptance. They are shown there is hope and change is possible. The ones who are further along come to appreciate their progress and recall when they used to feel shock and anger.

Goodbyes and closure are important for all transitions. We feel there should be a group ritual in which each member has the opportunity to say goodbye and validate each other's progress and strengths. Hopefully, each child has come to value the importance of asking for support and will continue to seek peer and adult support when needed.

### B. Goals:

To understand the importance of saying goodbye.

To gain experience in asking for support.

To learn that sharing experiences and feelings helps others.

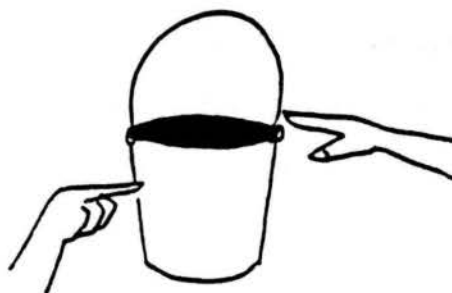
To find good memories to cherish.

To develop a belief in their own inner strength.

To gain closure on the painful memories.

**Activity: Feeling Basket****Age Levels: 3 years & up**

**Directions:** This activity can be used as a check-in on a weekly basis or as a final goodbye activity. Produce a basket, bucket or some type of container and have each member indicate what his or her present emotional state is in terms of fullness or emptiness of the basket. Each child may then talk about what contributes to the felt level and what he or she needs from the group to bring up the level of fullness (validation, hugs, support, etc.).



**Process:** This activity helps to illustrate the varied and dynamic feeling states of the members. It also provides for self-assessment and expression of feelings. Discussion may center around contributing factors and resultant feelings when one's basket is overflowing or only containing one drop. It also allows for the opportunity to ask for what they need.

**Materials:** Basket, bucket or container.

**Source:** Stock, Roger - Kids In the Middle



### Activity: Let Go Of and Hold Tight

Age Levels: 8-16

**Directions:** Ask the children to trace their hands on paper and put their name in the corner of the paper. The papers are passed around and each member writes one quality he or she wants to see the owner keep inside the hand outline. This may be a strength or characteristic they like about that person and want to see them hold on to. Then in the area outside the hand outline, each member will write of something they would like to see that person let go of. This may be a belief, characteristic or habit that impacts that person's progress. The papers are returned to the owners and each member can read his or hers to the group. They may offer agreement or disagreement on the group's perceptions.

**Variation:** This activity can also be used as a group contract where each member writes on the inside outline what he or she wants from the group. On the outside outline area, each child writes what he or she is willing to give to the group.



- Process:** Focus the discussion on the content of each member's perceptions.
- Materials:** 12 x 18" paper.  
Pencils.
- Source:** Moffet, Monica - Kids In the Middle

**Activity: Spotlight****Age Levels: 3 years & up**

**Directions:** Each member takes a turn being in the spotlight. The other members then share what is special about that person, what is admired, what was learned from, or what is wished for that person.



**Process:** This is a good experience to be done from time to time or particularly if a member is leaving. It allows the children the opportunity to express positive thoughts and feelings about each other and promotes positive self-worth.

**Materials:** None.

**Source:** Adapted from Canfield, Jack (1976), 100 ways to enhance self-concept in the classroom. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

**Activity: Guided Imagery: Safe Place****Age Levels: 8 Years & up**

**Directions:** Discuss the importance of having a safe place all our own to retreat to in times of stress or for relaxation. Have the children sit comfortably or lay on the floor with their eyes closed. Then describe peaceful imagery which guides the children to a place in their imagination, which is trouble free and all their own (see Appendix for sample). Upon completion, direct the children to the present. Soothing background music may be played during the experience.



**Process:** Open the discussion by asking the children how they felt during the experience. Sharing about the experience should be optional. If a child chooses to share his or her safe place, it may be drawn or described. Explore what the qualities are that make it safe for that child and encourage future use of this technique.

**Materials:** See Appendix for sample narration.

**Source:** Oaklander, Violet (1978). Windows to our children. Moab, Utah: Real People Press.

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**MANUAL APPENDIX**

---

## FEELING POKER Game Cards

Copy these questions on construction paper cards. Questions could also be xeroxed, cut out and glued on cards.

---

What should parents tell their kids about divorce?

---

What is the most confusing thing about your parents' divorce?

---

You would be surprised to know that. . .

---

What feelings are hardest for you to share?

---

What is your favorite thing to do?

---

When Mom says bad things about Dad, I. . .

---

I would never tell my Dad that. . .

---

When my Dad says bad things about my Mom, I. . .

---

If I were a father I would. . .

---

The saddest day of my life was when. . .

---

What is one good thing about divorce?

---

If you were the President, and you could make a law about divorce, what would that law be?

---

If your family was a rock group, what would the name be?

---

If my Mom were asked to describe me, she would probably say I was. . .

---

What do you worry about the most?

---

It really makes me mad when my step-dad/mom. . .

---

One thing I'm really proud of myself for is. . .

---

Which parent do you wish you had more time or less time with?

---

I could never tell my Mom that. . .

---

How did you find out that your parents were going to get a divorce?

---

Name a time you were most angry with your Mom.

---

Describe a happy memory.

---

Say something good about each group member.

---

What do you do when you're alone?

---

The worst thing that happened to me was. . .

---

Name someone or something you are afraid of.

---

Name a time you felt sad.

---

Do you ever wish your parents were married?

---

What would you tell other kids to do if their parents get a divorce?

---

I am usually punished by

---

Who do you blame for the divorce?

---

How do you feel about your Mom or Dad dating?

---

Do your parents fight now? What do you do if they do?

---

Describe your Dad in one word.

---

When you are angry, how do you show it?

---



Do you know why your parents got divorced?

---

Which parent do you get along with best?

---

I wish my Dad

---

A lesson I have learned from life so far is

---

If I were asked to describe my Mom, the first word I think of is

---

What do you do if either parent asks you lots of questions about the other parent?

---

Who do you tell your troubles to?

---

Name a time you were angry at your Dad.

---

**FEELING CHARADES**

Cut out and fold or transfer topics to construction paper playing cards.

Your family is having dinner, act out the scene.

---

Act out how your parents told you about the divorce, or how you found out.

---

You are having a great day with your Dad, act out what you're doing.

---

You are talking to your parent about your step-brother or sister, what are you saying?

---

Your family is talking about something you do that they are proud of, act out what they say.

---

Act out how you would make a new friend.

---

Your Mom or Dad is having a meeting with your teacher, act out what they are saying.

---

You are returning from a visit with your Dad/or Mom, act out what happens.

---

Your parents are talking to each other on the phone, act out what and how they talk to each other.

---

Act out what you do best.

---

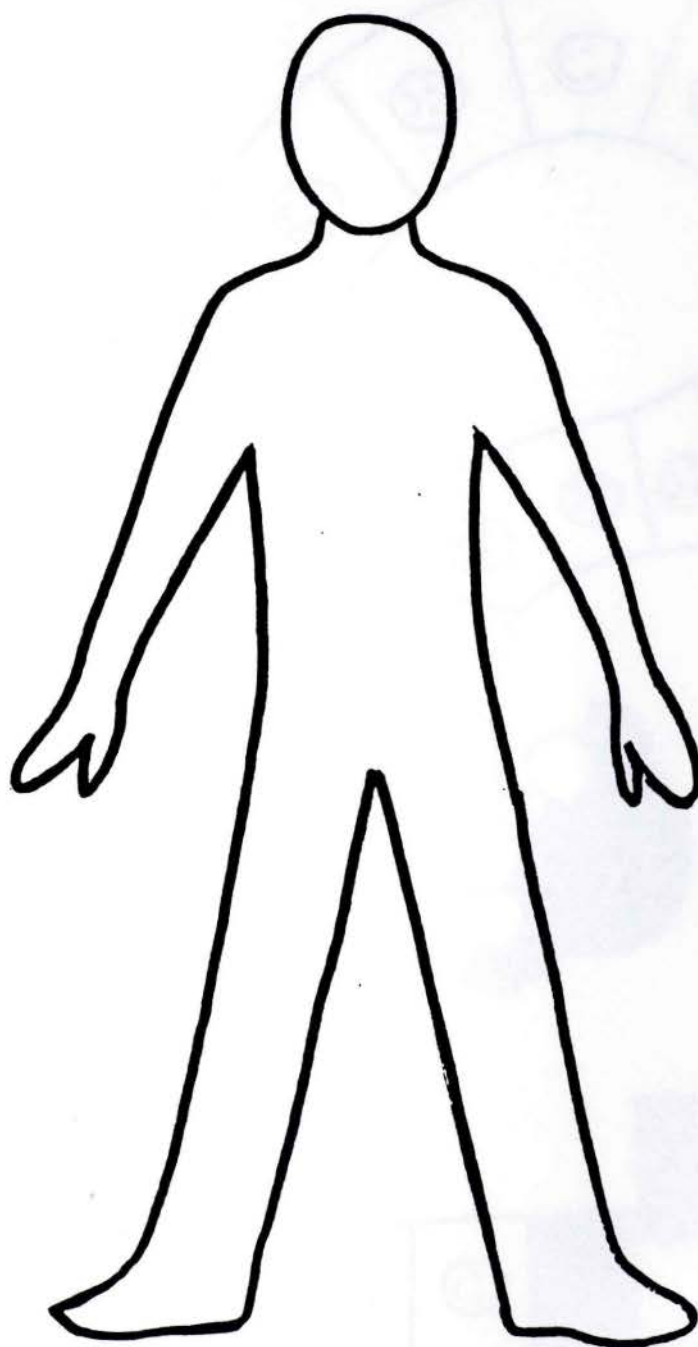
Act out an argument in your family.

---

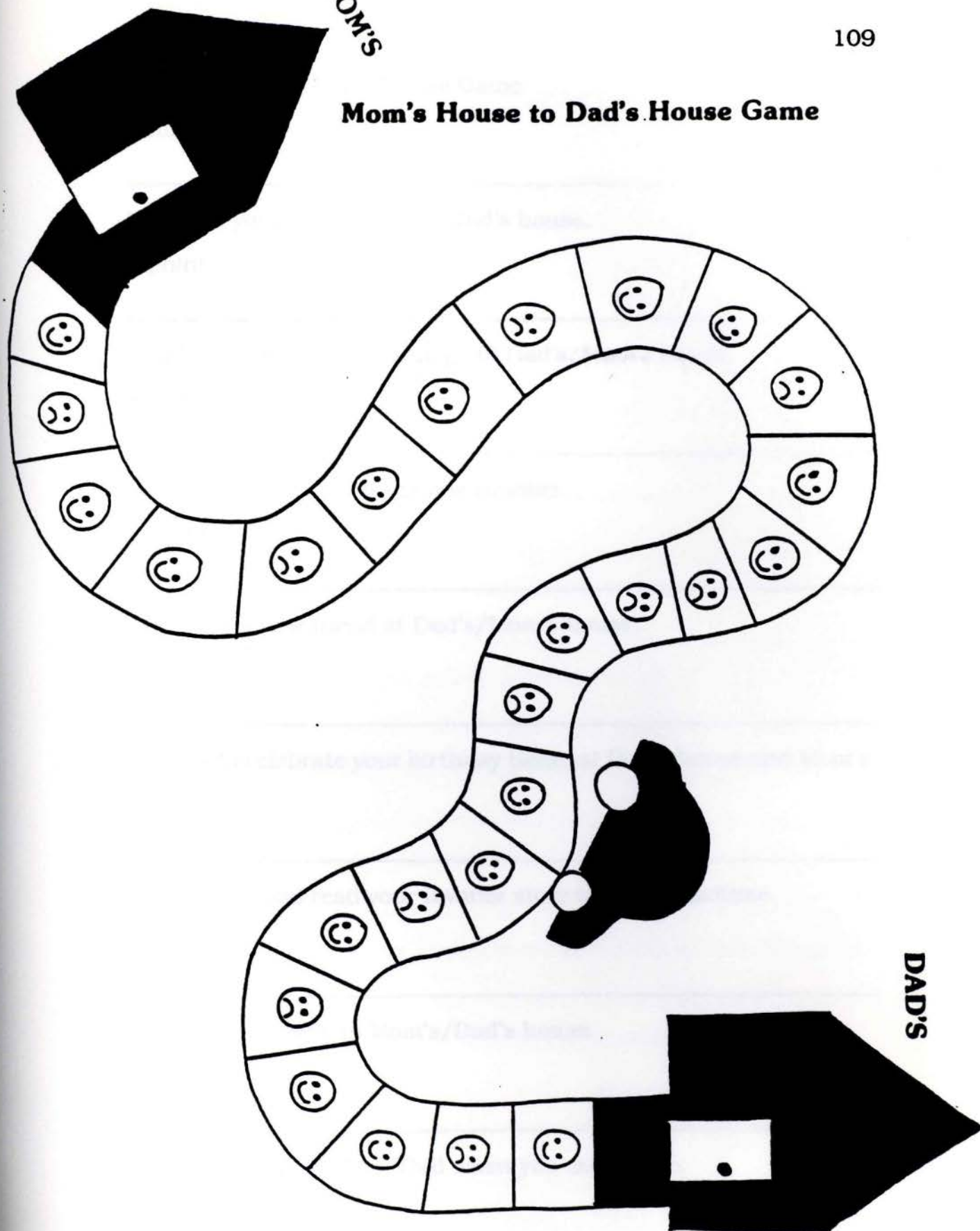
Act out your favorite thing to do with your Mom.

---

### Where Do You Keep Your Feelings?



MOM'S

**Mom's House to Dad's House Game**

Recreate diagram on poster board or construction paper.  
Make playing cards with the questions on one side and  
the appropriate feeling face on the back.

**Mom's House to Dad's House Game****Smiley Cards**

---

You took your favorite toy to Dad's house.

1 point

---

You know what day you will go to Dad's/Mom's house.

1 point

---

You know Dad's/Mom's phone number.

1 point

---

You meet a new friend at Dad's/Mom's house.

1 point

---

You get to celebrate your birthday twice, at Dad's house and Mom's.

1 point

---

Your Mom/Dad read your favorite story to you at bedtime.

1 point

---

You know the way to Mom's/Dad's house.

1 point

---

You can call your Mom/Dad when you miss them.

1 point

---

Your Mom/Dad is really glad to see you and gives you a big hug.

1 point

---

You have toys you like at both Mom and Dad's house.

1 point

---

Unhappy cards

You forgot your teddy bear when you went to Dad's house.

---

You forgot you were going to Dad's/Mom's house.

---

You miss your Mom when you're at Dad's house.

---

You miss your Dad when you're at Mom's house.

---

You left your (bookbag, toy, toothbrush, etc.) at Dad's/Mom's house.

---

Dad/Mom fixed your least favorite food.

---

Dad is going out of town so you won't be able to see him for awhile.

---

There isn't room to ride your bike at Dad's/Mom's house.

---

Mom/Dad was late when he/she picked you up.

---

Mom/Dad was too busy to spend much time with you.

---

25% COTTON



## Patterns for Family Silhouettes



Cut from black construction paper.

My Family is Like...(poem topics)

Write a poem or paragraph on these topics.

My family is like...

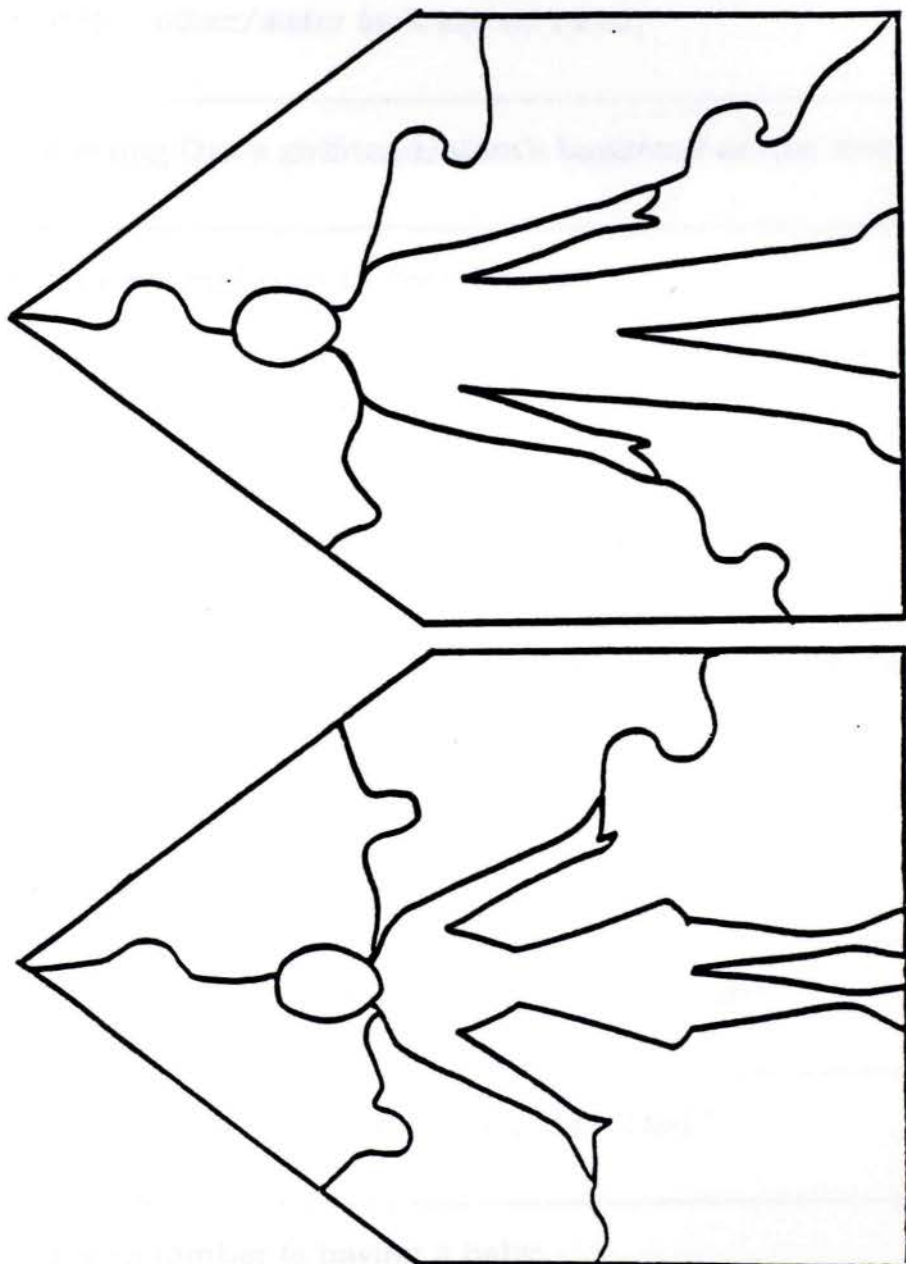
If dogs got divorces...

The color of divorce is...

I'm unique because...

You can't eat "spaghetti feelings"...

Parent Puzzle



## Visitation Skit Topics

Cut and fold, or duplicate on construction paper playing cards.

My step-brother/sister took my old room.

---

I'm meeting Dad's girlfriend/Mom's boyfriend for the first time.

---

Mom's boyfriend tries to discipline me.

---

Your dad is getting remarried.

---

You go to Six Flags with your step-brother.

---

Mom and step-dad have a lot of different rules. Dad's rules are different, too.

---

Where do I belong?

---

When I go to Dad's house, there's no time for me.

---

My Mom wants me to call my step-dad "Dad."

---

Your step-mother is having a baby.

---

Your step-parent seems to favor their children and you get blamed a lot.

---

### Situations & Solutions

Cut and glue to construction paper playing cards or duplicate on cards.

---

Your parent asks you to spy on the other parent and report back to them. How do you feel? What can you do?

---

Your Dad wants you to deliver an unkind message to your Mom.

---

Your parents get into a big argument while you have a friend visiting.

---

Your Dad remarried and your step-sister/brother treats you like an outsider.

---

Your non-custodial parent bought you lots of presents for your birthday but doesn't spend much time with you.

---

Every time you visit your Dad, his girlfriend is there.

---

Your teacher wants you to bring both of your parents to a conference, but you don't know where your Dad is or how to get hold of him.

---

Dad is always late when he picks you up for a visit.

---

Your Dad or Mom has their boyfriend/girlfriend over and you see them kissing.

---

While visiting your Dad, he has his girlfriend spend the night.

---

Every time your Mom's name is mentioned, your Dad starts saying bad things, which upsets you.

---

Your step-parent wants you to call them Mom/or Dad.

---

Your Mom is getting married to a man you don't like.

---

Mom wants you to stay home and keep her company all the time.

---

Your Mom has been going out a lot and you are home alone.

---

Mom's boyfriend spanks or touches you when you're alone with him.

---

Guided Imagery - narration

"In a minute I'm going to ask all of you to close your eyes and I will take you on an imaginary fantasy trip. Before we begin, notice what's going on in your body. Are you tense anywhere? How are you breathing? Are you taking deep breaths or small, quick breaths? I would like you to take a couple of very deep breaths now. Let the air out with some sound. I'm going to tell you a little story now, see if you

can follow along. Imagine what I tell you and see how you feel while you're doing it."

"Imagine that you're walking through a forest now. There are tall trees all around, the air is cool, birds are singing. The sun shines through the tree tops, and it's shady and quiet. You love walking in the forest. There is a little path that is leading you forward and along the edges of the path are little wild flowers, rocks and small animals scurrying about. Rabbits peek out and notice you passing. The path begins a slow incline and begins going uphill. Soon you are at the top of the mountain and you sit on a nearby rock to take a look around. The sun is shining and the birds are soaring above the valley below. Across the way, you see the top of another mountain. You can see that there is an opening or cave in that mountain. You would like to be able to explore that mountain and notice that the birds can easily fly there. You wish you too could fly and suddenly you feel yourself rise and your arms become wings. You test your wings and start to soar across the valley with the birds."

"You direct your landing to the mountaintop and when your feet touch the ground, you turn back into yourself. In climbing around the mountaintop, looking for the opening to the cave, you find it easily. There is a small door and crouching down, you open it slowly and enter the cave. Once inside, there is room to stand up. There is a long hallway ahead of you and you walk down it carefully. You notice that there are rows and rows of doors, each with a name written on it. You begin to look for the door with your name on it and when you find it, you stand there quietly. You know that once you open the door and go

inside, it will be a place that is all yours and only yours. It might be a room or a place you remember. It might be a place you've dreamed about, or have never seen. But whatever or wherever it is: it will be there only for you.

"Slowly, you turn the knob on the door with your name on it and step through. Look around at your place! Are you surprised? Where is it? Who is there? How do you feel in your space? Walk around and explore your place. (Pause)

"When you are ready, say goodbye to your space for the time being and close the door gently. You will be returning another day. Now open your eyes and find yourself back in the room, safe and secure after your journey."



## Evaluation of Activity Manual

1-5, please indicate your response by checking the appropriate box.

Have you used any of the activities in *Therapeutic Exercises for Children of Deafness*?

Yes

No

Do the activities using activities from the manual in the field?

Appendix B

Questionnaire

### Evaluation of Activity Manual

For Items 1-5, please indicate your response by checking the appropriate blanks.

1. Have you used any of the activities in Therapeutic Experiences for Children of Divorce?

Yes                       No

2. Do you anticipate using activities from the manual in the future?

Yes                       No

3. With what therapy modalities are you using the activities? Check as many as apply.

- Individual counseling
- Group therapy (open end)
- Support group
- Time-limited group
- Other

4. Do you use the activities exclusively with divorce issues?

Yes                       No

5. Is your use of the activities planned or spontaneous?

Planned                       Spontaneous                       Both

6. Please rate the quality of the activities with respect to the categories listed below. For each category, circle the number that corresponds to your rating. Rating scale: 1 = poor, 5 = excellent.

- a. Appropriateness for the needs and interests of children

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

- b. Effectiveness in helping children clarify their feelings and issues

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

- c. Effectiveness in helping children achieve therapeutic goals

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

- d. Effectiveness in helping children communicate their thoughts and feelings to others.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. How could the manual be improved?
8. Comments

## Dear Letter

I would like to ask you to complete a questionnaire form on the Activities  
you purchased from books in the Middle Level Therapeutic  
Program for Children of Divorce. I am interested in finding out how  
you are using the activities in the manual and whether you think they  
are an effective aide to counseling work with children.

I appreciate your filling out the enclosed form and returning it  
in the envelope provided. Your feedback is important and will be  
valued when changes are made to improve the Activities Manual.

## Appendix C

## Cover Letter

I am writing to ask you to complete an evaluation form on the Activities manual you purchased from Kids In the Middle entitled Therapeutic Experiences for Children of Divorce. I am interested in finding out how you are using the activities in the manual and whether you think the activities can be effective aids to counseling work with children.

I would appreciate your filling out the enclosed form and returning it to me in the envelope provided. Your feedback is important and will be considered when changes are made to improve the Activities Manual.

Thank you for your assistance with this.

Sincerely,

Monica Moffet

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