

INTRODUCTION

The activities that follow are designed to be used in a divorce support program. However, they can also be incorporated into an existing curriculum.

NOTE: Be sure to obtain approval from your POC prior to using this program.

UNDERSTANDING THE 6 - 9 YEAR OLD

Children in this age group seek to be independent and have mastery and accomplishment at school and on the playground. They are transitioning from a world mostly dominated by family, to one that includes school and peer group. At this age the peer group begins to take on greater importance. Six to nine year old children are also developing a strong sense of self and beginning to evaluate themselves in relation to others (“She does math better than I do.” “I can throw the ball farther than he can.”). They have a strong desire to fit in with their peers. When parents divorce, children of this age group may become self-conscious and worry about feeling different from their peers. One of the benefits of a divorce support group, is that they realize they are not alone or different from everyone.

Six to 9 year old children are also at the stage when they are able to disguise and/or hide their feelings. They will rarely come out and say, “I feel different from my friends” or “I feel sad about the divorce.” This is why children this age need opportunities to identify and express feelings in non-threatening ways.

THE CAREGIVER’S ROLE

To the child, mom and dad are everything. They measure themselves by how they are treated by them. However, they are also strongly influenced by other caregivers.

The caregiver sometimes provides the most stable relationship for the child during a divorce.

CAREGIVERS CAN:

- Provide security in the middle of chaos
- Establish a safe, and familiar place for the child to rest and play
- Provide the extra understanding and patience the parent/s may not be able to give during this time

WHAT CAREGIVERS CAN SAY TO CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:

When children start to talk about divorce and the changes in their lives, acknowledge their feelings and use statements such as:

- It’s not your fault
- Kids don’t cause divorce; kids can’t fix divorce
- You can love both parents
- Your parents still love you
- I will still be here for you

WHAT CAREGIVERS CAN DO FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:

- Create a partnership with the parent/s
- Don’t take sides in the conflict
- Maintain consistency with discipline and routine
- Focus on the child’s strengths and praise them often
- Give them unconditional acceptance

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- Let them know you will be there for them

WORKING WITH PARENTS

It's important to work with the parent/s in a collaborative way.

- Make them aware of the materials you are using and the activities you plan to use.
- Maintain 2-way communication - Let them know how their child is doing in school or other children's programs, and ask them to let you know of any issues that come up at home, including behaviors and emotional reactions.
- Let the parent/s know you want to work with them as a team to help their child.

THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum is divided into 6 sessions. Each session addresses different issues children face when parents get divorced. Since learning to identify and cope with feelings is such an important part of dealing with divorce, a feelings section is included in all 6 sessions.

CHILDREN'S BOOKS:

Although not required, books can be an extremely helpful tool to use in a curriculum such as this. They provide information to the child in language and images they can understand and provide a vehicle for questions and discussions.

Example: "Do any of you have Moms and Dads that live in different houses like the people (or animals) in our story?" "Have any of you had feelings like the children in our story today?"

NOTE: Be sure to obtain approval from your POC before introducing a new book into the classroom.

There are many children's books about divorce which can be found at your local library, bookstore or online (see "Resources" section).

Some popular children's books on this topic are:

- My Life Turned Upside Down, but I Turned It Rightside UP, Mary Blitzer Field and Hennie Share
- At Daddy's on Saturday, Linda Walvoord Girard
- Through the Eyes of Children: Healing Stories for Children of Divorce, Janet Johnston, Karen Brueuing, Carla Garrity and Mitchell Baris
- What Can I Do? A Book For Children of Divorce, Daniell Lowry
- Families, Meredith Tax

CURRICULUM

SESSION 1: UNDERSTANDING DIVORCE

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: When parents get divorced, a lot of changes happen for the family. Some of the changes can be a little confusing or scary, and a lot of different feelings can come up. For the next few weeks we are going to be talking about your parent's divorce, how it feels for you and ways you can handle it all.

We will also be talking about the different feelings you might be having and looking at which ones seem easy and which ones seem hard. We'll come up with ways to handle the hard feelings and enjoy the easy feelings.

RULES, GUIDELINES and EXPECTATIONS: Go over any rules or logistical information that needs to be addressed.

ICE BREAKER: Have Group members introduce themselves using their name and a word that starts with the same letter as their name to describe them, for example, "I'm Marvelous Mary". The leader can begin the process (to model) and end the process (to remember everyone's name). Have everyone go around the circle and state your name and the names of those who have gone before you.

ACTIVITY 1

HANDOUT 1a: When Your Parents Told You About the Divorce

Materials needed: crayons, markers, colored pencils, cutouts, stickers, etc.

Ask the children: "Do you remember where you were when your parents told you they were getting a divorce?"

Instructions for the handout: "Draw a picture of where you were when your parents told you they were getting a divorce. Under the picture you can write what you said and what they said."

HANDOUT 1b: Color Your Feelings

Ask the children: "Do you remember what you felt like when your parents told you they were getting a divorce?"

Then ask: "If feelings were colors, what would happy, sad, angry, scared, etc., look like? What color would they be?"

Instructions for the handout: Ask them to put a color mark next to the feelings on the handout which they think best represents the feeling for them.

Then explain: "The figure below represents you. Use crayons or markers to color and draw your feelings."

Invite the children to talk about their drawing and/or what they wrote or drew about their feelings. Do not call on children or make them think they have to talk. You are trying to create

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a non-threatening and safe place for them to be. When they begin to feel comfortable with the class, they will begin to share more.

ACTIVITY 2: FEELINGS ARE LIKE BUBBLES

Materials needed: A container of bubbles for the instructor and one container per child (optional depending on age and maturity of group).

There are many feelings you can have when your parents get divorced and all of them are ok. Each week we will be learning about feelings and how to handle them. Today I want to play a fun game with you that can help you learn about feelings.

1. Have the children sit around the leader on the floor. Ask them to remain seated while they are in the group, but encourage them to enjoy (and even pop) the bubbles you blow.
2. Begin by talking about how you like to blow bubbles. Discuss how blowing bubbles can make you feel calm, relaxed and happy. Blow several rounds of bubbles for the kids to enjoy.
3. Say "Did you know that bubbles are like feelings?"
(continue blowing bubbles through the discussion)
 - Sometimes they are big and sometimes small
 - They can come out really fast or really slow
 - Sometimes they get stuck together (like sad and mad)
 - If you blow really hard, they explode (like anger)
 - You can control how they come out.
 - You can make a bubble grow by blowing slowly, but it doesn't leave the wand if you stop (like keeping your feelings inside)
 - If you are calm, the more control you have over the bubbles that come out (like staying calm to handle your emotions)
 - Blow a lot of bubbles really quickly- Those look like happy bubbles
 - Blow one big bubble slowly and let it float (lonely)
 - You can share them with others (blow them over the kids heads)
 - Sharing them with others feels good
 - BE CREATIVE and let the children add ideas.

Give the children each a bottle of bubbles and let them "share" happy bubbles with each other. Allow some time for play

Activity 3

Handout 2: KIDS DON'T CAUSE DIVORCE

Materials needed: pens, pencils, crayons

Kids sometimes think they did something to cause divorce. Some think "If I had only made better grades in school," or "I shouldn't have gotten so mad at my sister/brother," or "I shouldn't have come straight home from school like my parents told me to."

The fact is that kids don't cause divorce - ever. Divorce is never about the child's behavior, it is about differences between the moms & dads.

Instructor: Read the instructions on Handout 2.

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After the exercise is completed, invite the children to share what they wrote down. Remind them that kids don't cause divorce and kids can't fix divorce. Divorce is a grown-up problem.

Explain to the children: "If you think you may have caused your parents' divorce, you may want to show them this exercise and talk with them about it. Parents want to know how you're feeling and what you're thinking so they can help."

Activity 4: BREATHE DOWN TO COOL

Gather back into a circle and teach "breathe down to cool."

** This exercise can be repeated in any session whenever you think the children are getting restless and need a break.

Tell them this is a game that can help them calm down when they feel mad or sad or angry, etc.

Ask the children to lie down on the floor. If available, you can have them put small stuffed animals on their bellies. This way they can watch the animals rise and fall as they breath. This gives them a concrete way to understand the breathing.

Breathe Down to Cool Instructions:

- Pretend that your belly is a big balloon
- Now, breathe all of the air out of your balloon till there is no air left at all and your belly goes flat
- Now, breathe the air into your belly and fill up the ballon again all the way
- Now, hold your breath till I finish counting 3 - 2 - 1
- Breathe out slowly 5-4-3-2-1 till all the air is gone and your belly is flat again
- This is what we call a Belly Breath. Use it to calm down.

Recap: Thank them all for being there and recap what you learned today.

1. Lots of things change when parents get divorced and lots of important things stay the same.
2. Kids don't cause divorce.
3. It helps to talk with other people who help you feel better about things.

Then tell them what you'll be learning about at your next meeting.

SESSION 2: THINGS THAT CHANGE AND THINGS THAT STAY THE SAME

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: Recap what was learned in the last session. Then let them know what they will be learning about today. Example: "Today we will be talking about changes caused by divorce and things that stay the same and don't change after the divorce."

ICE BREAKER: CIRCLE ROLL OR TOSS

For circle roll, have the children sit in a circle. Call a child's name and roll the ball to that child. Then that child calls out another child's name and rolls the ball to them.

For circle toss, have the children stand in a circle. Follow the same procedure as above, but have them toss a small, light weight ball or a bean bag back and forth.

Divorce brings a lot of changes into the family and a lot of changes for you. All of these changes can seem overwhelming at times, however, there are also a lot of things that remain the same. Thinking about things that stay the same can help you feel calmer. Let's take a look at the handout and see which things have stayed the same.

ACTIVITY 1

HANDOUT 3: "THINGS THAT STAY THE SAME" (instructions on the handout)

Materials needed: Blue and red crayons, pens, pencils

ACTIVITY 2

HANDOUT 4A: (FEELING CIRCLES) & Handout 4B FEELING FACES

Materials needed: crayons, pencils, pens

Lots of feelings happen when our parents divorce or when anything changes that we wish would stay the same.

Look at the feelings listed on the handout. For each feeling you've had, draw a face in the circle. The circles at the bottom have blank lines on them where you can write other feelings you've had. Look at the handout of feelings faces to help you identify some of the other feelings. You might even think of other feelings that are not on the handout.

Look at the feelings words and faces you just drew. Which ones are easy feelings and which ones are hard?

EASY AND HARD FEELINGS:

1. Easy feelings -
You don't usually have to work on these- they just come.
The behaviors that come with these feelings usually don't cause problems for you. What are some easy feelings? (Let the children call out names of some easy feelings and then say, "Let's talk about "happy" today.

Let's talk about Happy
What makes you happy?
How do people know you are happy?
What does your body do when you feel happy?
Show us what you look like when you are happy.

2. Hard Feelings - These feelings cause many problems for kids, especially when they don't know what to do with these feelings.

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That's when the behaviors that cause problems can come out. Let's look at something very interesting about feelings.

Let's talk about Sad
What makes you sad?
How do people know you are sad?
What does your body do when you feel sad?
Show us what you look like when you are sad.
Are there any behaviors that come with sad feelings that can cause you problems?

HANDOUT 5: WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL SAD?

Materials needed: crayons, pens, pencils

Talk children through handout and ask if they have other ideas.

ACTIVITY 3: FLY YOUR FEELINGS AWAY

1. Group leader instructs the participants on the construction of paper airplanes.
2. On the inside of the airplanes, the participants will write or draw their hard feelings.

The airplanes are flown and may be targeted toward a container or a target (away from others with respect to safety).

This is followed by a group discussion about the importance of sharing one's fears in order to reduce them. Once they are expressed they seem less frightening. (Remember to invite the children to share, but don't call on them or make them feel like sharing is mandatory.)

RECAP: Ask children to gather in a circle again and make a statement such as, "What we've learned today is that even though a lot of things change when parents get divorced; there are a lot of things that stay the same including the people who love and care about us." Thank them for coming and participating.

SESSION 3: TALKING TO YOUR PARENTS ABOUT THE DIVORCE

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: Recap last week's session.

Example: "We've talked about the feelings you've had when your parents told you about the divorce. Sometimes talking to your parents about these feelings can help you feel better inside. Today we will look at ways you can help your parents understand what you are feeling."

ICE BREAKER: Have each child tell something about themselves that is true and one thing that is not true and have the others guess which of the facts is true. Example: "My uncle is a doctor, and my favorite color is blue." "I have red pajamas, and I love snakes."

ACTIVITY 1

HANDOUT 6: Talking to Parents About Feelings

Materials needed: crayons, pens, pencils

Talking about feelings can sometimes be hard. Starting your talk with "I feel," can sometimes make it easier. Try finishing each statement with a feeling you've had.

[Start this activity for the students by modeling the process and filling in the first blank with your own feelings word. (Refer to handout 6.)

After the exercise is completed, you can state: "If it's hard for you to tell your parents about these feelings, you may want to show them this exercise. If they know how you feel, they can help."]

Invite the children to share their "I feel" statements.

ACTIVITY 2

EASY AND HARD FEELINGS

Materials needed: crayons, pens, pencils

Let's talk about a couple of easy and hard feelings.

1. Today's Easy Feeling: Calm
Talk about what it means to be calm.
Ask them, "What does calm look like?"
Have the children practice "breathe down to cool." Then ask them if they feel different than they did before doing the exercise.

2. Today's Hard Feeling: Worried
Discuss with the group how worried is a feeling that sometimes builds up. It may start out as other feelings like frightened or scared and if those feelings are ignored, it can grow to worried, afraid or even terrified. Sometimes you can recognize worries by listening for some key words. "What if" - this is a BIG worry sign. For example, "what if I have to move away and change schools?", or "What if my Mom forgets to pick me up today?" You can also see signs of worry in people. What are some signs people are worried? (Talk fast, pacing, asking what if questions). Ask "what things do you worry about?" "How does 'worry' cause problems for you?"

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ACTIVITY 3

HANDOUT 7: WHAT IF, WHAT IS

Materials needed: crayons, pens, pencils

Distribute "WHAT IF, WHAT IS Handout 7

Learn to replace the "WHAT IF" with a "WHAT IS"

Example from above:

1. What IF: "My Dad moves far away?"
What IS: "Dad is here now and no one has said he is moving away."
2. What IF: "Dad forgets to come see me?"
What IS: "Dad has never forgotten to come see me. He will always come see me even if he is far away."

Have the children practice saying a "what if" and replacing it with a "what is"

Handout 8, "Scared/ Anxious Steps"

Read the instructions on the handout and talk with the group about different things they could do if they have scared or anxious feelings.

Examples: talk to your parents or other adult, talk to a friend, color or draw your feelings, breathe down to cool, think about the "what if's" and tell yourself "what is," think about what is staying the same, play outside, ride a bike, find a friend to play with -

ACTIVITY 4

HANDOUT 9: Talking to Others About the Divorce

Sometimes talking to others can help with the hard feelings. There are lots of people you know who care about you. Sometimes talking to others about the divorce can help. There will be people you want to talk to about the divorce, because they help you feel better inside. There will also be people you don't want to talk to, and that's okay too.

Instructions: Circle the people you would like to talk to about your parents' divorce, and put an X over those you do not want to talk to. Add other names if you wish.

Invite the children to talk about the different people on their list. Don't call on any one or require that everyone share.

RECAP: Ask the children to gather in a circle and talk about what they've learned today. You may want to end the session with "Breathe down to cool" if you have time.

SESSION 4: WHEN A PARENT IS DEPLOYED AND FAR AWAY

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: Sometimes a parent is far away during a divorce, and this can be hard for both you and your parent. There are things you can do that can help you feel closer and make things easier. We'll be talking about this today.

ICE BREAKER: Ask the children to say their name and a feeling and act the feeling out. Example: My name is Sue and I'm Mad! (clinch fists, make a face, stamp feet, etc.). Model the exercise for the children first.

STORY: (to be read by instructor) Emily was very sad that her Dad was going away again. The day before he left, he gave her a purple ribbon for her hair and told her that every time she wore it, or anytime she saw the color purple, she could think of him and know that he was thinking of her.

You might want to send your parent something small and special that will let them know you are thinking about them a lot. It could be a special rock you found, a favorite scarf or bandana, a ribbon, or a small toy or teddy bear. You can let them know that every time they look at this special gift, they can think of you. You may also want to ask your parent to give you something special too.

DISCUSSION: Ask the children if they can think of special things they might want to give their parents who are far away, then ask them to draw picture of it. Let them know if they have several objects that come to mind, they can draw all of them.

ACTIVITY 1

HANDOUT 10: How to Stay Close to a Faraway Parent
Materials needed: crayons, pens, pencils, markers, etc.

Ask the children to circle the pictures on the handout that show how they would like to stay in touch with their parent. Ask if they can think of any other ways to stay in touch.

There are all kinds of feelings we might have when our parents get divorced and when one or both of our parents are far away. (Lead in to Activity 2.)

ACTIVITY 2: FEELINGS LESSON

Today's easy and hard feelings are Silly and Lonely.

1. Today's Easy feeling: Silly

Silly is probably one of the easiest feeling. You don't even have to work at it. You can catch silly from other people, and it happens most often when you are with people you know. The only problem with silly is that it can grow and grow and sometimes become out of control because it is so much fun.

Let's practice getting silly and then making it stop.

When I say "go", give me your best silliness. But be ready to listen.

When I say "stop", freeze!

(Do this several times, encouraging the children to really listen for the "stop.")



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2. Today's Hard Feeling: Lonely

Lonely is very different from silly. Silly is something that happens often happens with a group, but lonely is a feelings that happens when you feel by yourself.

What makes you feel lonely?

Can you feel lonely even when you are with people?

You can discuss missing the person who is deployed if appropriate at this time.

HANDOUT 11: I FEEL LONELY; WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Review handout with children and ask if they have any other things they can think of that might help if they felt lonely.

Recap: Ask them to gather in a circle and ask them what they learned today. Reflect back to what they say and ask the group what helped them the most.

SESSION 5: DIFFERENT HOMES

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: Recap last week's lesson.

When parents divorce, one of them usually leaves the home and moves into another house or apartment. We will be talking about this today and looking at how you can handle it.

When one parent moves out of the home, it means you now have 2 homes because each parent will want you to stay with them sometimes. This may feel strange at first, but after time, you will get used to it and may even like certain things about. Remember, you belong to both parents and both homes.

ICEBREAKER: Ask the children to state their name and do a movement or make an expression that lets the group know how they feel. The group guesses the feeling. The instructor can model the exercise initially.

ACTIVITY 1

Materials: construction paper or poster paper & crayons, markers, paints.

1. Draw a picture of the front of your mom's home. Write the address and phone number.
2. Draw a picture of the front of your dad's home. Write the address and phone number.
3. Draw a picture of your room at your mom's home. What do you like best about the room?
4. Draw a picture of your room at your dad's house. What do you like best about the room?

Instructor: Many things change in our lives. You may have changed schools before or moved to a different neighborhood or a new city.

Make a list of things that have changed in your life.

- How did it feel at first? You can use the feeling chart to help you name the feelings.
- How long did it take you to get used to it?

Remember, you have gone through changes before and gotten used to them. You will get used to your new situation too.

ACTIVITY 2:

Going back and forth: Sometimes leaving one house to go to another is hard. Some kids feel sad when they leave one parent to visit the other parent. Feeling sadness is normal. You can learn ways to make it easier.

Handout 12a: Going Back and Forth

Instructions to children: "Put a check mark by each of the ideas they think will help. Then write down any other things you can think of."

Handout 12b: Going Back and Forth

Sometimes kids feel sad or mad while they are being taken from one parent's home to the other. What can you do that might help?

Read the items on the handout aloud and then ask the children to put a check mark by the ideas they think might help and then write down some ideas of their own.

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ACTIVITY 3: FEELING LESSON

Sometimes parents don't know that you are having a hard time with something. Do your parents know that moving from one parent's home to another is hard for you? Write down ways you could let them know. What could you say to them? If it's hard to talk, you can show them the exercises we've done. When you let them know what's wrong, they can help.

1. Today's Easy feeling: Excited
Have the group members show you what they look like when they are excited. Talk about how excited is a feeling that is hard to keep inside. Demonstrate to the group by sharing some really exciting news (My Mom or Dad is coming home!) but say it in a very monotone, no excitement voice, with apathetic body posture. Ask the group to share the most exciting thing that has happened to them lately. Encourage the other group members to watch closely as exciting things are being share and be ready to tell ways they can tell the person is excited.
2. Today's Hard Feeling: Mad
Ask the children what they look like when they are mad. Ask them where they feel their anger (stomach, head, face, etc.). Ask them what they do when they are mad. How will others know you are angry?

HANDOUT 13: STOP, RELAX AND THINK

When you get really mad, it is hard to think about things clearly. You have to teach yourself how to slow down your body and your brain from the mad feelings so you can think of what to do next. Let's look at some ways you can learn to "Stop, Relax and Think."

Read through the handout. Discuss and practice the exercises with the children

SESSION 6: WHAT TO DO WITH FEELINGS

GREETING: Welcome the children and parents as they come into the room. Greet the children at eye level. Invite the children to explore the different parts of the room and the materials.

INTRODUCTION: Recap last week's lesson.

We have talked a lot about what happens when your parents get divorced and the kinds of feelings you may have. You've learned some things you can do with feelings, and today we are going to look at more ways to handle them.

ICE BREAKER

Let the children pick out which ice breaker from previous lessons they want to do. If time allows, let them do more than one.

ACTIVITY 1

Handout 15: I Feel/Because/I Need

Before the session, make "I feel/Because/I Need" cards from #14 handouts.

At the beginning of the activity, give the children handout #15.

1. Talk with the children about how feelings are expressed.
2. When grownups have to guess what a child is feeling, they only guess based on the behaviors they see. They don't understand what happened or what to do to help with the feeling. So, when grownups guess, they usually get it wrong!
3. The best way for grownups to understand all about your feelings is to talk to them.
4. Introduce the I feel, because, I need fill in the blank cards to the children
5. Lay out the 3 categories of cards in different areas.
6. Have the children take turns identifying a feeling card to put on the "I feel" card, followed by a "because" card, and then an "I need" card.
7. Have the children read all of the 3 parts to the group.

After doing this a few times, see if anyone might give a real example (without the cards, but using the fill in the blanks as prompts) to tell how they feel about something going on in their life.

Discuss how to use this technique both at home and school. You can use it for both hard and easy feelings.

Considering leaving the fill in the blank cards hanging in the room as a reminder. Remind the children when you see a feeling to use this communication tool. I often call it "your most powerful weapon" in dealing with your feelings. You can use the cards to remind children of options or as a prompt for a child who doesn't talk much when the feelings are flowing freely.

ACTIVITY 2: THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Whenever something happens that you have particular feelings about, you are usually telling yourself something about the situation. We can call this "self-talk." Changing the words you say to yourself help you feel better inside.

Read the following stories to the group.

Story 1: Andy's parents told him they were getting a divorce. They said dad was moving out and he would stay with dad part of the time and mom part of the time. Andy thought to himself: "I wish my parents weren't getting divorced. I don't like that dad won't live here all of the time, but I'm glad he will be close by and that I'll get to see both of my parents every week.

Andy felt OK.

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Story 2: Sarah found out that her parents were getting divorced. They told her that mom was moving out and she would stay with mom part of the time and dad part of the time. Sarah told herself: "I wish my parents weren't getting a divorce. I don't like that mom won't live here all of the time. This is just the most awful thing that could ever happen and it will be terrible to only see both parents part of the week.

Sarah felt very sad and mad.

Which kind of self-talk would you choose?

EXERCISE

HANDOUT 16: SELF-TALK AND FEELINGS

Look back at the 2 stories about Andy and Sarah. Can you guess which words helped Andy feel "OK" and which words made Sarah feel "sad and mad?"

Write some thoughts you have had about your parents' divorce that make you feel sad or mad.

Now write some thoughts that might help you feel ok.

Sometimes changing the words we say to ourselves about things can help us feel better.

ACTIVITY 3

Making your muscles calm down can help the way you feel.

Sometimes when we have hard feelings (mad, sad, worried), our muscles get tight and this can make our head or body hurt and leads to more hard feelings. Just like breathing down to cool, calming our muscles can also help us relax and feel better.

EXERCISE: Have children sit or lie down in a comfortable position. They can keep their eyes open or shut depending on what's comfortable for them. Read the following script. Have the children hold each position for about 5 seconds.

Pay attention to your body's muscles for a moment. Starting at the top of your head, see if you can notice any tight or calm feelings in your muscles.

I'm going to ask you to tighten and then release the tightness in different muscles in your body. Let's start with your face.

1. Close your eyes tight, and scrunch your face up as tight as you can. Now let go of the tightness and calm your muscles down.
2. Now make a growling lion face and open your eyes and mouth as wide as you can. Now relax the lion's face and calm the muscles down.
3. Now try to touch your ears with your shoulders and scrunch your shoulders up toward your ears as tight as you can. Now bring your shoulders down and calm the muscles.
4. Straighten your arms and make a fist as strong as you can. Now release your fists and calm the muscles down.
5. Try to make your belly button touch your spine by holding in your stomach as hard as you can, but keep breathing! Now release and take a big breath.
6. Now point your toes and straighten your legs and tighten your muscles as hard as you can. Now release and let the muscles calm down.
7. Now tighten all of the muscles in your body including your face. Now let go and let all of the muscles calm down.
8. Take a few belly breaths. (If the children are lying down with eyes closed, ask them to open their eyes and sit up.)

SUPPORTING CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

Activities-Based Program for School Aged Children Ages 6 - 9

9. Now pay attention your body's muscles for a moment starting at the top of your head and notice if there are any changes in the way your muscles feel.

Invite the children to talk about their experience. Remind them that calming down their muscles can help them calm down their feelings as well.

WRAP UP: Thank the children for coming to the sessions and for sharing with the group. Remind them of what they have learned:

- Kids don't cause divorce and kids can't fix divorce.
- Some things change when parents get divorced, but a lot of things stay the same.
- Talking to our parents about the divorce can help us feel better.
- Talking to other adults and friends can help us feel better too.
- There are things we can do to stay connected with our parents when they are deployed.
- Some feelings are easy and some are hard, but all feelings are ok.
- There are many things we can do to help with our hard feelings such as: Breathing down to cool; calming our muscles; talking to our parents and friends.

Addendum

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: Here are some additional activities to use either in place of some of the ones in the curriculum or in addition to them if time allows.

Please feel free to be creative with the curriculum and use it in the way that is best for your group. If the group is restless, you may want to have the kids practice breathe down to cool or calming the muscles. You may also want to engage them in a game of feelings bingo (listed below) or repeat an icebreaker they particularly enjoyed. Or make up your own.

FEELINGS BINGO - HANDOUTS 17 (make additional copies as needed)

From one of your copies, cut out the feeling words and mix them up in a box for you to draw from. Make sure to mix up the bingo cards so that the kids have as many different ones as possible.

You can have the children play with button, plastic chips, candy pieces, etc and

Give small prizes

Play several rounds as time allows

FEELINGS VOLCANO

Materials needed:

Chalkboard or Wipe off board (classroom size), chalk or markers. Can also be done on large butcher paper taped to the wall

1. Draw a basic picture of a volcano on the board adding the elements included on the drawing ([see Volcano handouts 18](#))
2. Once you have the elements in place, ask "How do you think you are like this volcano?" Hand out the volcano drawing if desired for the kids to write in things you are saying.
3. Starting at the bottom, with the inside pressure, add the words "YOUR INSIDE FEELINGS". Ask to children to list feelings they are having that are causing problems. Add these words to the bottom of the volcano.
4. Inside the volcano add the words "THINGS THAT MAKE ME FEEL THIS WAY". Discuss how circumstances or events often contribute to these feelings. Write their responses inside the volcano.
5. Compare this volcano to a real volcano in that when the inside pressure meets the outside pressure an eruption occurs.
6. At the explosion point on the drawing add the words "MY BEHAVIORS." Ask the children what actions or behaviors they show when their emotional volcano erupts and add these to the top of the drawing.
7. Ask "Who gets hurt when your volcano explodes?" Next to the wildlife and trees, write the names of who in their lives get hurt when feelings explode. Always include "ME" on the list, stating that every time a volcano erupts, it takes off a little of itself in the explosion.
8. Finally, state, "There is one way you are different from a real volcano. Scientists cannot keep a real volcano from erupting, but you can keep your feelings volcano from erupting."
List "COPING SKILLS" in a blank area on the drawing. List any coping skills you have and those the children generate (talk to someone, write letters, time alone, music, writing, etc).

The processing occurs throughout this discussion.

Be creative. Try to incorporate most of the ideas they have into the volcano. Don't worry about your drawing skills, they love making fun of stick figures done by adults!

REFERENCES

The Divorce Workbook for Children: Help for Kids to Overcome Difficult Family Changes and Grow Up Happy, Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

Kids' Turn, www.kidsturn.org

Helping Children Understand Divorce, University of Missouri Extension, Kim Leon & Kelly Cole, <http://extension.missouri.edu>

Recommended Books About Divorce For Children and Adolescents, The Barr-Harris Children's Grief Center, Books Reviewed by Benjamin Garber, M.D.

Activities for Helping Children Deal with Divorce, University of Missouri-Columbia, Sharon Leigh & Janet A. Clark, <http://californiadivorce.info/psychology.children.activities.htm>