Understanding grief and loss with children from divorced families

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to present information about how grief and loss affect children from divorced families. Divorce can be just as traumatic as the death of a loved one, and the divorce rate continually increases every year. Two models of grief and how they apply to children of divorce are presented, as well as an explanation the process of grief in relation to divorce. Finally, this researcher identifies prevention and intervention techniques that schools and the whole community can use to aid children through the grief process of divorce.
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UNDERSTANDING GRIEF AND LOSS WITH CHILDREN FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

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The purpose of this paper is to present information about how grief and loss affect children from divorced families. Divorce can be just as traumatic as the death of a loved one, and the divorce rate continually increases every year. Two models of grief and how they apply to children of divorce are presented, as well as an explanation the process of grief in relation to divorce. Finally, this researcher identifies prevention and intervention techniques that schools and the whole community can use to aid children through the grief process of divorce.
In the 1990's, almost 15 million children dealt with divorce (Amato, 2000; Maher, 2003; Sammons & Lewis, 2001), and by the year 2010, more than half of all school-age children will have spent a substantial amount of time living with a single parent or stepfamily (Sammons & Lewis). Divorce does not just affect parents; it affects the whole family system. Although divorce has become very common in our society, for many children and adults, a divorce can be as painful and confusing as an actually to death (Frankel, 2000). Consequently, the grief associated with divorce is similar to grief associated with death.

In this paper, the author will define why it is important not to trivialize the experiences and feelings that children have during and after parental divorce. This will be completed by defining grief, looking at the grieving process of children and adolescents, addressing how the grieving process is related to divorce, looking at how children and adolescents grieve a divorce and the process of it, defining normal and abnormal grief, and listing therapeutic interventions that counselors, teachers, parents, and the school can do to help children and adolescents cope with parental divorce. Many children and adolescents do not have the skills to successfully cope with parental divorce and can suffer from the effects into adulthood. Therefore, adults in children’s lives need to be ready to help them through the grieving process. Parental divorce is not something new, and it is not going to go away. That is why it is crucial to be educated about how it affects children.
Definition of Grief

When people grieve, it is an emotional suffering that is caused by a loss of someone or something close to them (Charkow, 1998; Payne, Horn & Relf, 1999). Grief is a reaction to loss and does not always have to be associated with death; people can also grieve a divorce, a separation, other close relationships, a lost job, or a pet (Davidson & Doka, 1999). Researchers have found that there is a common grief process that most people share, but grief’s intensity, duration, and expression are unique to each individual (Charkow; McGlauflin, 1998). Even though grieving a traumatic event is very difficult, McGlauflin stated that, "Grief is a natural, healthy, human response to losing the people, places, and things children and adults love and care about" (p. 47). Knowing that grief is both a process and unique to each individual can help parents and educators understand how to help children cope with grief associated with divorce.

Rationale for Studying Grief and Loss in Children of Divorce

The 2000 Census Bureau estimated that 1,300,000 divorces and dissolutions are granted every year in the United States, and 60 percent of those divorces involve children (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 2001). Furthermore, "traditional" families made of two biological parents and their children living under the same roof now only account for a fourth of all families (Arbuthnot & Gordon). These are very startling statistics, but all too real. Looking at these statistics, it is
apparent that many children in the school setting will confront divorce in their own family or with friend’s parents.

To help children through divorce, it is important that counselors, teachers, and parents know how to react and help these children work through the divorce. It is also important to realize that each individual child may react differently to the divorce. For example, in terms of social skills, some children from unstable or divorced families were found to be more aggressive and had more difficulty adjusting with family and friends compared to children from in-tact families (Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; Dunlop, 2001; Sammons & Lewis, 2001). Academically, children’s grades may fall and school may not be as important to them anymore because they do not care (Maher, 2003; Sammons & Lewis). Physically, children may have psychosomatic illnesses like stomachaches, headaches, loss of appetite, and over eating (Sammons & Lewis).

The two biggest areas that educators and parents should pay close attention to are children’s emotional health and individual self-worth. If children do not adjust well to the divorce, there can be serious consequences to their overall health. Wallerstein, Lewis and Blakeslee (2000) found that when young children encounter feelings of rejection, loneliness, anger, guilt, anxiety, fear of abandonment, and a deep yearning for the absent parent, there can be life-long consequences. Wallerstein, Lewis and Blankeslee’s longitudinal study found that
37 percent of the children she studied were moderately or severely depressed, five years following the divorce.

In fact, some children are so depressed that they turn to drug dependence, criminal activity, and even suicide to avoid feelings of pain and (Sammons & Lewis, 2001). According to Sammons & Lewis, many of the consequences of divorce can carry into adulthood if they are not dealt with successfully. That is why it is so important to teach counselors, teachers, and parents how to help children who are dealing with a divorce.

If children are taught positive coping skills and have a strong family support system, they adjust more quickly to divorce (Amato, 2000). As Kot and Shoemaker (1999) noted, “The four factors that correlate highly with adjustment to divorce: a child’s coping skills, family functions and stability pre-and post divorce, external social support systems, and post divorce conditions (i.e. parent adjustment)” (p. 167). Out of those four factors, Kot and Shoemaker rated teaching coping skills as the most powerful way to aid children in the adjustment of a traumatic event. The more counselors, teachers, and parents are aware of the effects that parental divorce can have on the children, the earlier they will be able detect the warning signs of abnormal grief. Educators will then be able to assess where the children are and teach them the necessary coping skills.
Typically people associate grief or loss with death, but the truth is that grief and loss is defined in a much broader context such as when someone or something close to them is no longer present (Bruce & Schultz, 2001). Grief and loss affects everyone from the loss of a dream, a job, an absent family member, a friendship, one's health, looks, and status (Vernon, 2002b). Additionally, people can experience the loss of a neighborhood, a partner, in-laws, or a non-custodial parent (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 2001). Since grief and loss is defined so broadly, many of the same emotions are expressed in all grief and loss circumstances, in particular, divorce. As in all losses, individuals may have feelings of anger, denial, guilt, sadness, helplessness, and depression (Charkow, 1998).

Staudacher (1991) stressed that even though individuals may experience the same feelings, they can be expressed in many different ways. Their expression of emotions depends on their culture, religious beliefs, and experiences they have had throughout life (Vernon, 2002b). For instance, children may feel angry because this is not how a “real” family lives. Some children pretend or deny that the divorce ever happened and they constantly try to reunite their parents.

Some children may also feel guilty because they think their parents are getting a divorce because of something they did. Counselors need to assess how responsible children feel for their parents’ divorce because most often children have nothing to do with it (Vernon, 2002b). Children may also need to reconcile
the fact that they cannot change what has happened to their family, according to Vernon.

Children often feel sad because they realize things will never be the same. Helplessness and anxiety are common. Anxiety stems from the feelings of uncertainty of the unknown related to how their family is going to survive being apart (Vernon, 2002b). Children also get depressed for many reasons. Sometimes the divorce is too much for them to deal with. Also, they may feel like they do not have anyone to talk about the divorce with, so they keep their emotions and thoughts all bottled up. In the past, divorce has been pegged as the parents’ problem, but it is clear that children are a huge part of the equation and sometimes children have a harder time, then parents, accepting the divorce.

Models of Grief

Even though everyone experiences death differently, there are common feelings and stages that are associated with grief. Experts have studied the behaviors and feelings that are typically associated with grief, and they found common clusters of behaviors and feelings that occur during certain time periods. Therefore, the experts developed stage models to help describe the grieving process (Payne, Horn & Relf, 1999). In all the grieving models, the number of stages and duration in which they occur are different. Although, the stages may have different names, most of the models are comparable (Payne, Horn & Relf).
Bowlby's Phases of Grief

Kagan (1998), as well as Payne, Horn & Relf (1999), described Bowlby's phases of grief as an effective model to use with children who are grieving a divorce. Bowlby's first stage, numbness, is where children's first reactions to a loss are shock and disbelief; they are basically on "automatic pilot". These feelings may last a few hours to a few days, but are then replaced by yearning, which is where the numbness is replaced by short intense episodes of anxiety, tension, anger, and self-reproach. Despair, the third stage, is where the grievers begin to see the divorce or death as inevitable, and the frequent intense pain of the loss is replaced by hopelessness and apathy. The last stage, recovery, is where children learn to adapt to their new life by finding a new or another purpose in life. This process can take years, and while there may be setbacks, learning about and working through these stages can help children understand that they are not alone and that they have to get on with their lives.

Kubler-Ross Stage Model of Grief

The second model that can be used to help children understand the grieving process is the Kubler-Ross stage model of grief. The first stage of the Kubler-Ross model is denial and isolation, where the initial reaction is to deny that anything bad has occurred, and children may think that at any time their parent is going to return home (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 2001). Also, children may isolate themselves and not face their feelings (Kagan, 1998; Payne, Horn & Relf, 1999).
The second stage is *anger*. Once the griever has accepted the loss, he or she typically gets angry and acts out by hurting him or herself or others (Arbuthnot & Gordon; Kagan; Payne, Horn & Relf). The anger stage is typically intense and can be expressed in many different ways (Arbuthnot & Gordon; Kagan; Payne, Horn & Relf). The third stage, *bargaining*, is where children have expressed the anger and now want to bargain with God in order to bring back the lost one (Kagan; Payne, Horn & Relf). Children may also try to bargain by being “super good” so mom and dad want to get back together (Arbuthnot & Gordon).

*Depression*, the forth stage, begins when griever realizes that the bargaining is not going to work and sadness and despair set in (Kagan; Payne, Horn & Relf). This is when many children feel hopeless and helpless, and parents, teachers and counselors especially need to be aware when children are in this stage (Arbuthnot & Gordon).

*Acceptance* is the final stage of the Kubler-Ross grief model. In this stage, the griever reach peace and accept what has happened (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 2001; Kagan, 1998; Payne, Horn & Relf, 1999). Understanding the process of grief can help children understand that their feelings are real and valid. These stages or models are best used when children have adequate comprehension skills.

**Grief Process of Children**

Grief is an individual, unique experience that everybody experiences differently, depending on the person, the type of grief, and his or her
developmental level. It is important to take the individuals’ developmental level into consideration because children conceptualize death and grief differently, depending on their cognitive ability (Charkow, 1998). For instance, children under the age of two can sense that something is different around them, but they do not understand or comprehend what divorce is. They will probably not remember the parent who has left them if they do not see the non-custodial parent again (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

Children ages three to five think divorce is temporary and that the family will get back together. They do not understand abstract concepts such as their parents not loving each other anymore (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). They may experience short spans of sadness and will probably substitute attachment to the person who has left with another person or stepparent (Cedar Valley Hospice; Kot & Shoemaker). Children at this age will also feel abandoned by the parent who has left.

Children ages six to nine begin to understand that divorce may be permanent, and they fear that others may leave them too (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997). They may also begin to feel a sense of guilt or blame themselves for the divorce, and they will probably have a hard time putting feelings into words. Also, at this age children ask a lot of questions because they want to understand what is happening (Cedar Valley Hospice).
Children ages ten to twelve know that divorce is probably irreversible, but they may still have feelings of guilt or blame about the situation (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Children sometimes see their parents’ divorce as a punishment for something they did; they may ask questions about finances, child support, and other aspects of divorce (Kot & Shoemaker).

When adolescents reach the ages of thirteen to eighteen, they can basically comprehend divorce at an adult level (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). They may worry about their own relationships and not want to talk about the divorce around others (Kot & Shoemaker). Many adolescents are embarrassed about what they would call dysfunctional families, and think they are different than everyone else (Kot & Shoemaker). However, with time and support, they usually accept and understand why their parents got a divorce and move on with life.

**Normal vs. Pathological Grief**

Many children and adolescent do not accept their parents’ divorce, and some of the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors may become abnormal and need to be carefully monitored. It is not always easy to define the difference between normal and pathological (abnormal) grief; understanding the signs and symptoms of normal grief and the particular developmental characteristics that are more common at certain age levels is helpful. Also, noting the frequency, intensity, and duration can help parents and educators distinguish between normal and abnormal
behaviors. Additionally, any changes in typical behavior patterns should be noted.

*Normal grief.* Some typical (normal) reactions or behaviors to grief include sadness, anger, guilt/self-blame, denial, fear, psychosomatic symptoms (Frankel, 2000), behavioral problems, more aggressiveness (Anonymous, 1998; Cudina & Obradovic, 2001; McGlauflin, 1998); lack of concentration, inability to complete tasks, fatigue, withdrawal, and low self-esteem (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999; McGlauflin). These are just a few of the normal behaviors that children and adolescents may go through after they have suffered a loss.

Counselors, teachers, and parents also need to be aware of typical developmental behaviors that may occur more often at a certain age. The following characteristics from Cedar Valley Hospice (1997) should be shared with educators and parents. Toddlers ages two and under may be fussier, more clingy, and may regress. Children ages three to five may also regress, have nightmares, become more aggressive, and noncompliant. Children ages six to nine may assume the role mother or father to replace the lost person. They may also become more aggressive, possessive, and could develop psychosomatic symptoms as well as regress. Early adolescents may also be more aggressive, possessive, defiant, and have psychosomatic symptoms. Finally, adolescents ages thirteen to eighteen typically become more aggressive, possessive, and defiant. Also, they may suffer from psychosomatic symptoms. Other characteristics to
watch for in adolescents include turning to unhealthy sexual behaviors, drugs abuse, and increased risk-taking.

*Pathological grief.* Even though grieving is a normal part of life, if the grief is not dealt with, it can become abnormal. There is a fine line between normal and abnormal grieving, and it can be hard to determine when normal grieving becomes abnormal. Cedar Valley Hospice (1997) workers identified some signs for abnormal grieving, including an extended period of depression with loss of interest in daily activities, chronic hostility, inability to sleep for long periods of time, loss of appetite, acting much younger/older for an extended period of time, suicidal thoughts that include an actual plan, chronic withdrawal from friends, sharp drop in school performance and refusal to attend school, drug and alcohol abuse. Sammons and Lewis (2001) stated that “Red flags should go up when behavior solidifies into a fixed pattern that does not change in response to changing circumstances may be at risk for severe depression” (p. 107). Some additional warning signs that indicate children should have further parental support or professional intervention are if they start stealing and lying, have more explosive behavior, and withdraw to the point of isolation (Iowa Mental Health Counselors Association, n.d.). Hopefully, knowing the normal and pathological (abnormal) grief signs and symptoms can help counselors, teachers, and parents be empathic and address the abnormal behavior before the child or adolescent is permanently traumatized.
There are many different ways professionals and even parents can help children successfully work through a divorce. In the next section, the author will describe suggestions that professional and nonprofessionals can use to help children and adolescents work through grief associated with divorce.

A Comprehensive Approach to Divorce through Prevention and Intervention

In order to help children grow and develop in a healthy way, it is vital that educators and parents take a comprehensive approach in working with children and adolescents. When children are faced with adversity such as a divorce, they need many different support systems, which is why a comprehensive approach involving counselors, teachers, parents, the school, and the community is absolutely necessary.

What Counselors Can Do

There are numerous things that school counselors can do to prepare children to deal with the various issues associated with divorce. School counselors can be with children every day and are trained to help with them on grief and loss issues by demonstrating empathy, unconditional acceptance, support, and allowing children to express their feelings freely (Charkow, 1998).

Classroom guidance. Within a developmental model there are three approaches: remedial, crisis, and preventative. The core component in a developmental guidance program is the preventative aspect, which is typically done in the classroom (Vernon, 1999). The psychoeducational aspect of a
comprehensive guidance program is very important because counselors can discuss grief with all students during classroom guidance activities. For example, showing movies and reading books about divorce and grief are excellent ways to open the door for communication about feelings, coping skills, and family changes, and these activities allow students to see that they are not alone (Charkow, 1998). Furthermore, talking openly about divorce allows those children who have not experienced a major loss relate to others' situations, according to Charkow.

Counselors can integrate discussions about divorce into their curriculum during a grief and loss or family theme (Vernon, 1999). Hopefully, once taboo topics like divorce are out in the open and talked about they will lose their mystification, and it will be easier for children to discuss thoughts and feelings associated with divorce. It is also vitally important to discuss the grief process in terms that children can understand, depending on their developmental level.

Finally, children need to realize that grieving is a natural, normal, and healthy response to a loss (McGlauflin, 1998). Most importantly, every person has the capacity to heal in an emotionally, safe and supportive environment (McGlauflin). Besides classroom guidance, there are many other roles that school counselors can fill to help children through a divorce.

*Group counseling.* Group counseling is an excellent therapeutic approach to help children and adolescents who are grieving a divorce. In a group
environment, children realize they are not alone; that others have similar reactions, thoughts and feelings about parental divorce (Charkow, 1998; Vernon, 2002b). Vernon noted that grief and divorce groups are usually a safe place for children and adolescents to share their feelings including anger, confusion, shame, guilt, helplessness, anxiety, and depression, and when talking about feelings, it is essential that the leader normalizes them so group members do not feel as isolated or alone. Vernon also stated that groups are a place where children and adolescents can develop coping skills needed to survive their loss and that how well a child or adolescent adjusts or copes to a loss depends on finances, social and family relationships, independence and dependence, and day-to-day living issues. In groups, participants can also be educated on grief and loss issues of divorce by discussing topics like custody issues, financial matters, stepfamilies, and legal matters. Finally, Vernon stated that group counseling is an excellent place to talk about essential issues like the right to live a happy life, living every day to its fullest, and looking at the meaning of life.

Within the group setting there are many different interventions that counselors can use. Some counselors use creative dramas and role-plays within the group to break the ice or talk about subjects that are a little too close to home (Vernon, 1999). Morganett (1990) developed and designed a comprehensive group counseling unit on grief and loss for adolescents. Although these lessons are geared towards grief and loss from a death, they could be adapted for any kind of
loss. These lessons typically address feelings associated with loss, for example, how to say goodbye and how to heal.

*Individual counseling.* In individual counseling, counselors work with students who need help adjusting to difficult life events such as divorce. Individual counseling may work better for children or adolescents who are having an exceptionally hard time adjusting to parental divorce. Furthermore, some children and adolescents may not have a parent at home who will let them express what they are feeling, so they may just want to have someone who will listen and validate them.

There are many individual interventions that can be used for children who have experienced a loss. The counselor needs to first assess the child and identify individual needs. Are they emotional, social, self, physical, or cognitive problems? Is the child acting out in class, has the child become introverted, does the child have chronic stomachaches, or have the child’s grades dropped? Then, the counselor and client can develop interventions that would be the most helpful, such as making a memory box to keep pictures and mementos in a safe place, (Charkow, 1998); art therapy, which works well when children have limited vocabulary; journal writing, which helps children express thoughts and feelings about the divorce; letter writing and poems to which help express feelings; and bibliotherapy, which helps validate feelings and introduces coping skills (Vernon, 1999). *What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce?* (Winchester
& Beyer, 2001) is an excellent book to use with children who have a lot of questions and concerns about their parents’ divorce. Creating a survival kit is another excellent way to help those children who need something tangible cope with their thoughts and feelings of loss (Winchester & Beyer). Finally, Vernon (2002a) described a board game activity dealing with thoughts and feeling associated with moving on, as well as an activity about family changes that includes a story on welcoming new members into the family.

*Teachers*

Teachers are important resources for children of divorce. Teachers should be educated about how children grieve a divorce at different developmental levels because they may not know what is normal or abnormal for a particular developmental level. To become educated, teachers can ask their school counselor for resources, attend workshops on children of divorce, or do independent research. Finally, classroom teachers are with children for a substantial amount of time during the day and will probably be the first ones to see behavioral changes.

It is crucial that teachers keep in contact with the school counselor so they can work together to monitor the children’s behavior. Also, counselors can professionally help or refer those children who are not adjusting well (Cedar Valley Hospice, 1997). Some of the classroom behaviors teachers should look for include daydreaming, disorganization, flat affect, inability to concentrate or follow directions, difficulty sitting still, acting younger than their chronological
age, and increased in risk-taking behaviors (Cedar Valley Hospice). Many of these behaviors mimic Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), so teachers, counselors, and parents need to extensively assess the new abnormal behaviors so the child is not misdiagnosed (Cedar Valley Hospice).

There are also many things that teachers can do specifically in the classroom to help students deal with divorce. Teachers as well as counselors need to look for teachable moments to discuss grief and loss with children, as well as integrating the topic of grief, bereavement, and divorce into their curriculum. Literature is a good way to help children relate to and understand divorce because it is sometimes easier to talk about other peoples' stories then their own. Journal writing and stories topics are also excellent ways to initiate communication about divorce because it is sometimes easier to express feelings by writing as opposed to talking about them.

It is also important that children understand the different kinds of losses and feelings associated with loss. First, teachers need to stress that there are many different kinds of loss, and that divorce is a major loss for many children even though their parents have not died. Also, teachers can help students deal with divorce by being open about their own personal experiences and feelings they have had with loss and divorce. Children then see that they are probably not alone in the thoughts and feelings they are experiencing. Teachers can also encourage open conversation and normalize the grief process by being honest,
honothing every goodbye (pet, friends, moving) (Charkow, 1998), allowing children to write freely in journals, reading a book about loss, and inviting a guest talk about the issue (McGlauflin, 1998). Most importantly, teachers should be role models for children to show them how to be supportive, sensitive, and understanding when others are grieving, according to Charkow.

Parents

Parents may not always know how to help their children through divorce because they have not formally been educated or trained about divorce and the effects it could have on children. However, parents play a vital role in helping their children cope with divorce. Many times parents do not know how to help their children when they themselves are having difficulty adjusting to this new reality. It is vitally important that parents be honest with their children, telling them only as much as they need to know (Auz & Andrews, 2002; Sammons & Lewis, 2001). Parents can fill in the details of the divorce as children get older, but knowing at least some of the circumstances surrounding the divorce makes it less scary for children (Auz & Andrews). It is also important for parents to maintain the children’s support network by keeping them involved with music, sports, friends, and scouts (Sammons & Lewis).

There are also things parents should avoid doing in front of their children, such as being hostile and aggressive with the other parent, criticizing or “badmouthing” the other parent, limiting visits or phone calls to other parent, making false
reassurances, using children as messengers, asking children to keep secrets, using children as spies, using children as emotional support, handing over adult responsibilities to children, ignoring what children want, not tolerating the children’s feelings, and being unwilling to recognize that children’s best interests may be different then theirs (Sammons & Lewis, 2001).

It is also important that parents know and understand some of the feelings that come from divorce, such as guilt, being powerless, victimized, and sadness (Sammons & Lewis, 2001). To help children cope with these thoughts and feelings, parents need make sure their children know it is not their fault, be open to questions, and spend lots of quality time together (Auz & Andrews, 2002).

There are many resources for parents that help them understand the effects of divorce and children. Parents can ask professionals such as school and mental health counselors for information and advice. They can also join support groups, or they can refer to books such as Don’t Divorce Your Children, (Lewis, 1999); The Good Divorce, (Ahrons, 1995); Second Chances, (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989); and What Every Women Should Know about Divorce and Custody, (Smith & Abraham, 1998). The more parents can learn about how divorce affects children, the more prepared they will be to help them. Counselors, teachers, and parents are not the only people who should be educated about divorce and grief; the whole school community needs to be educated as well.
School Community

Within the school, adults need to serve as positive role models and show how to appropriately deal with difficult situations. It is essential that schools create a compassionate, understanding atmosphere. To do this, schools administrations should educate the whole school staff through workshops, in services, and professional development about how to help children of divorce. They also need to be sensitive to the rights of parents: which parent is contacted in an emergency, gets newsletters, receives report cards, or comes to conferences? The school needs to have a system for these questions, and they need to make sure not put the child in the middle.

Community Programs

In many communities there are programs that children of divorce can participate in to help them cope. Rainbows is a program to help children, adolescents, and adults cope with divorce. Participants in Rainbows meet with trained volunteers for fourteen weekly session and talk about their feelings of loneliness, anger, and hatred they may have towards their parents (Coping with Pain, 1998). Many proponents of the program stated that, “It has grown because parents find it helps their children’s self-esteem, their behavior, and their grades at school” (Coping with Pain, p. 44).

The second program, Building Healthy Families, helps teach children and adolescents about the changing roles they can expect as their family transitions, as
well as positive coping skills (Slavkin, 2000). According to Slavkin, the program also helps to lessen the negative socializing impacts that divorce has on children. Eight intervention groups were designed to help children and adolescents survive parental divorce, and these groups were designed to address controlling anger, alcohol and drug abuse, responsibility for parental behaviors, neglect, sexual abuse, parental fighting, verbal abuse, and physical abuse (Slavkin). Community counselors and agencies conduct these programs. Based on Slavkin’s research, the Building Healthy Families program is an effective model for helping children and adolescents with parental divorce.

Conclusion

There are many things that professionals and parents can do to help children and adolescents work through a parental divorce. The research suggests that being educated about grief and loss associated with divorce and how it affects children and adolescents is one of the key factors in being able to help children of divorce cope. Prevention is also another good tool. Therefore, when children experience a traumatic event, they have some of the coping skills necessary to carry on with life. Finally, being a good listener and observer as to how children and adolescent of divorce are acting socially, privately, academically, and emotionally after a divorce is vital in seeing whether they are coping with the divorce. Children and adolescent are not adults, but they do have many of the same feelings and experience many of the same things as adults. As educators, we need to know
how to prevent and intervene when needed to help children and adolescents cope with a traumatic event, such as divorce.
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