

**AN EVALUATION OF A SCHOOL-BASED GROUP TREATMENT
PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This study outlines and evaluates a school-based group intervention programme, offering support and teaching problem-solving skills, for children of divorce. The effect of the programme on children's beliefs about divorce and their self-concept is empirically investigated. A sample of 17 latency age children was divided into an experimental group and a wait-list condition control group.

The results indicate that a group intervention programme can contribute towards positive changes in children's beliefs about divorce and improvements in their self-concept. Treatment effects for children of divorce are not only associated with the formal group intervention programme. Children in both groups improved on several measures from first to second testing and several explanations are offered for these findings.

This study suggests that group interventions can contribute to improved adjustment outcomes for children of divorce, by helping children develop more realistic beliefs about divorce and by improving their self-concept.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own original work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Mental Health at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

**SHERYL SMITH**

18th day of *November* 1996.

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**EVALUATION OF A SCHOOL-BASED GROUP TREATMENT
PROGRAMME FOR CHILDREN OF DIVORCE**

**CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION**

The separation and divorce of their parents are two of the most serious and complex mental health crises faced by children today. It has been suggested that the trauma of family breakdown is second only to the loss of a parent through death, as a stress-producing experience. When parents separate, children often experience a double loss : they experience the loss of the parent who leaves, and they experience the loss of the remaining parent, both of whom may be emotionally unavailable to their children at the time of the divorce owing to their own turmoil (Hett & Rose 1991 : 38).

There are unique problems and concerns faced by children whose parents divorce, including changes in life-style and loss of part of their previous psychological support systems (Cantor 1977 : 183). During the divorce process, children experience the loss of their identity as a member of an intact family. There are many changes to contend with - they may move to a different home, a different school and there may be noticeably less money to live on. Their parent's financial situation may alter - often necessitating that their mothers work full-time (Bonkowski, Bequette & Boomhower 1984 : 131).

Wilkinson and Bleck (1977 : 206) write that children of divorce are not to be seen as a separate diagnostic category. "For the most part, they are healthy, normal children who are usually confronted with an extremely stressful situation". Their behavioural reactions are varied and are related to their developmental stage. Divorce is a developmental crisis, not an intrapsychic crisis, and children react to the emotional consequences and implications inherent in it.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) conducted a longitudinal study of children's developmental responses to divorce - they concluded that divorce is stressful for most children and serves as a potential developmental interference. The developmental stage of the child at the time of the divorce was related to the quantity and quality of the child's reactions. These reactions included feelings of shame, anger, fears of being abandoned, a shaken identity, loneliness and loyalty conflicts. Reactions were also observed at school in the form of a decline in achievement, acting-out behaviour, strained relationships with peers and teachers. Several studies highlight a picture of significantly poorer adjustment for children of divorce, and point to their risk status (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980 ; Kurdek & Berg in Kurdek 1983 ; Hetherington, Cox & Cox 1979).

Although children of divorce have the potential to develop problems, divorce in a family does not always mean that problems will occur (Gardner 1970; Wallerstein and Kelly 1976 & 1980). There are several variables which predict good outcomes for children of divorce - contact with both parents post-divorce, the absence of major conflict between the parents post-divorce, the child's own coping abilities, and the availability of support systems to the child. Freeman and Couchman (1985 : 45) write that the nature, intensity and duration of the problems experienced by children of divorce are related to the child's age (when divorce occurs), the child's sex and the nature of the post divorce parent - child relationship.

1.1 Problem statement

While divorce does not of itself create psychopathology in children, it would seem to increase the likelihood of adaptational problems and adjustment difficulties which can interrupt the normal developmental processes for children. It would appear that children whose parents are divorced are at risk for a variety of psychosocial problems. This underlines the need for supportive interventions to help children work through the complex impact of their parents' divorce (Pfeifer & Abrams 1984 : 23; Wiehe 1984 : 24; Wyman, Cowen, Hightower & Pedro-Carroll 1985: 20).

It has been reported in Pfeifer and Abrams (1984 : 22) that the largest population affected by parental divorce is school-aged children, and that schools are a viable treatment setting for children of divorce. Pfeifer and Abrams (1984 : 23) argue that schools are a natural setting for the delivery of interventions to this special population. This is consistent with an educational philosophy that sees schools as responsible for educating the whole child and a view of community mental health which emphasizes the importance of preventive programming. Kalter, Pickar and Lesowitz (1984 : 613) write that the magnitude of divorce as a social phenomenon suggests that group preventive measures may represent the best way of delivering services to a population which is at risk for a variety of psychosocial problems. The use of groups to intervene with children of divorce is a relatively new procedure, despite a 50 year history of psychotherapy groups for children. Kalter, Pickar and Lesowitz (1984 : 613) refer to Abramowitz's comprehensive review of group work with children prior to 1976 which reported no group specifically geared for children of divorce. This points to the need for knowledge and research in this area.

If education has the responsibility to teach children how to realise their potential, and thus to cope with developmental crises as they occur, then it cannot ignore the sizeable crisis in a child's life caused by the divorce of his parents. Small groups led by a counsellor at school seem to be a helpful mode of support (Schreier & Kalter 1990 ; Pfeifer & Abrams 1984 ; Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, Hightower & Guare 1986 ; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen 1985 ; Omizo & Omizo 1987 ; Kalter, Pickar & Lesowitz 1984 ; Gwynn & Brantley 1987 ; Green 1978 ; Effron 1980 ; Cantor 1977 ; Cutsinger & Glick 1983 ; Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer 1989 ; Bowker 1982 ; Anderson, Kinney & Gerler 1984 ; Tedder, Scherman & Wantz 1987 ; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977). But some studies showed that a supportive environment may not be enough to produce positive outcomes (Roseby & Deutsch 1985 : 55) and acquiring specific competencies is a co-equal need (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen 1985 : 609).

The present study evaluates the effect of a school-based group intervention programme offering support and teaching problem-solving skills to children of divorce. The importance

of the research is underlined by the rising incidence of divorce in South Africa. The number of children involved in divorce has increased considerably in recent years.

1.2 Motivation for the study

The notion of developing an intervention programme for children of divorce arose during the researcher's professional experience as a school social worker, where she counselled many children whose parents were divorced. These children were seen for individual sessions by the researcher and the notion then developed that group sessions might have a value in dealing with children's feelings that they are "alone" "unique" and "different" in their response to their parents' divorce. The motivation for the present study was the researcher's interest in the generation of knowledge which would promote the use of groupwork directed towards ameliorating the negative impact of divorce on children.

Much has been written about the effects of divorce on children. Adjustment problems in the area of social, emotional and cognitive development among children of divorce have been documented. Wyman et al (1985 : 20) found that children of divorce had lower perceived cognitive competence, higher anxiety and fewer potential sources of support when compared to similar children from intact families. Wiehe (1984 : 17) found that children of divorce showed lower self-esteem, more negative attitudes towards their parents and an external locus of control orientation when compared with similar children from intact families.

Divorce has been shown to produce problematic attitudes in the child which contribute towards lowering his self-concept. Since a person's self-concept influences his behaviour, it is believed that a reduction in the problematical attitudes and beliefs of the child of divorce would enhance a healthy self-concept. Attaining a healthy self-concept is central to optimal psychological adjustment, personal happiness and satisfaction and more gratifying interpersonal behaviour. The present study is concerned essentially with the development of a group intervention programme for children of divorce which will offer support, teach problem-solving skills and address children's beliefs about divorce.

1.3 Objectives and assumptions

Children's appraisals of divorce-related events may affect their adjustment to the divorce (Kurdek & Berg 1987 : 712). Wallerstein (1983 : 233) suggests that the child's divorce adjustment process involves six coping tasks that are added to the customary tasks of childhood. Four of these tasks centre on appraisal of divorce : acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture, resolving anger and self-blame, accepting the permanence of the divorce, and achieving realistic hopes regarding one's own relationships. Kurdek and Berg (1987 : 712) refer to research which shows that children often construct problematic beliefs about both the nature of the parental divorce and their causal role in the divorce decision. They argue that if beliefs are causally linked to affective and behaviour disorders in children, the assessment of children's beliefs regarding parental divorce will provide a foundation for intervention strategies designed to assist children in revising faulty beliefs.

Since children's appraisal of divorce related events may affect their adjustment to divorce, the variable of children's beliefs about divorce was selected to be addressed directly or indirectly in the group intervention programme. Since a child's self-concept summarizes his own evaluation of his ability to realize his potential, his self-concept has a decisive influence on his personal adjustment; thus the variable of self-concept was selected to be addressed indirectly in the group intervention programme. Previous research results on the effects of a group intervention on the self-concept of children of divorce have been inconsistent (Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer 1990 ; Swartzberg 1982 ; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen 1985).

The present research study is intended to answer questions about some of the changes experienced by children who participate in a group intervention programme for children of divorce. It is assumed that children will conceptualize the divorce process more accurately as a result of the group programme. It is assumed that they will identify and understand their feelings about divorce; that they will learn new coping skills to deal with the feelings associated with divorce; that they will learn that they are neither responsible for the divorce, nor are they alone in struggling with this transitional crisis. It is assumed that children will

divorce

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have an opportunity to express their feelings in a safe environment (during the group programme) and that this will facilitate interaction and support among their peers. It is also assumed that the group experience will contribute to developing children's sense of self-worth.

The **objectives** of the present study are :

1.3.1 to develop a group intervention programme which offers support and teaches problem-solving skills for children of divorce.

→ **1.3.2** to investigate empirically the effect of this group intervention programme on children's beliefs about divorce.

→ **1.3.3** to investigate empirically the effect of this group intervention programme on children's self-concept.

1.4 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that :

1.4.1 the group intervention programme (offering support and teaching problem-solving skills) will develop more realistic beliefs towards divorce within the children, as measured by the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987).

1.4.2 the group intervention programme (offering support and teaching problem-solving skills) will improve the children's self-concept, as measured by the scores on the Self - Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985).

More realistic beliefs about divorce are **indicated** by:

1. lower scores on peer ridicule and avoidance.
2. lower scores on paternal blame.
3. lower scores on fear of abandonment.
4. lower scores on maternal blame.

5. lower scores on hope of reunification.
6. lower scores on self blame.

Improved self-concept is **indicated** by :

7. higher scores on scholastic competence.
8. higher scores on social acceptance.
9. higher scores on athletic competence.
10. higher scores on physical appearance.
11. higher scores on behavioural conduct.
12. higher scores on global self-worth.

1.5 Research design

The present study uses a **quasi-experimental design**, according to the criteria of Rubin and Babbie (1993 : 280), specifically the **non-equivalent control groups design**. This is described as an alternative research design that has less internal validity than a “true” experiment but still provides a moderate amount of support for causal inferences. A quasi-experimental design is distinguished from “true” experiments primarily by the lack of random assignment of subjects to experimental and control groups. Rubin and Babbie suggest the term comparison group instead of control group when subjects are not assigned randomly. However, in keeping with more common usage, the researcher will refer to the groups in this study as experimental and control groups.

The essential component of experiments involve : (1) randomly assigning individuals to experimental and control groups; (2) introducing the independent variable to the experimental group while withholding it from the control group; (3) comparing the amount of experimental and control group change on the dependent variable. Rubin and Babbie (1993 : 272) write that, in social work, the most common use of experimental designs is to evaluate the effectiveness of services or practice methods.

This study wished to evaluate the effect of a group treatment programme on children of divorce. The independent variable was the group intervention programme, while the dependent variables selected were children's beliefs about divorce and children's self-concepts (as measures of adjustment). In the present study, the experimental group received the group intervention programme (independent variable) during the first term of the school year, while the control group were "denied" the programme until the second term (waiting list conditions). Both groups were measured on the dependent variables (beliefs about divorce and self-concept) before and after the experimental group received the group intervention programme (at the beginning and at the end of the first term). Children's beliefs about divorce were measured by the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987 : 712) while children's self-concepts were measured by the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985). The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) also includes a Teacher Rating Scale, which was completed for both experimental and control group children both before and after the experimental group received the group intervention programme (at the beginning and at the end of the first term).

Since it was neither ethical nor acceptable to withhold the group intervention programme from the children who wished to participate in it, nor was it practically possible to achieve random assignment of subjects to either group, the present study was not a "true" experiment and could be described as using a quasi-experimental design according to the criteria of Rubin and Babbie (1993 : 280). The control (or comparison) group knew that they were going to participate in the group programme during the second term; they were obliged to get parental consent for their participation and this involved some discussion with their parents about divorce and the value of a divorce support group; furthermore, they were in the same classroom as children in the experimental group and it was not possible to prevent the participants in the programme from discussing it with their classmates. Random assignment of subjects to groups was not considered possible as the researcher preferred to have a balanced number of boys and girls in each group, because previous same-sex groups had been poorly behaved.

1.6 Data collection

The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale

The Self-Perception Profile For Children

The measuring instruments used for data collection were The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987) and The Self-Perception Profile For Children (Harter 1985). Permission was granted by the authors of these scales for the researcher to use them in the present study. (See Appendix 1 and 2).

→ The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987 : 712) is a 36 item self-report scale divided into six subscales : peer ridicule and avoidance, paternal blame, fear of abandonment, maternal blame, hope of reunification and self blame. It is described as an objective scale for assessing children's problematic beliefs regarding parental divorce. Research which evaluated the psychometric characteristics of the scale showed the scale to have moderate item-total correlations within each scale, and moderate 9 week test-retest reliability (sample 170 children, mean age 11.06 years). It is a yes/no objective scale and has been written to control for a yes/no response set. The scale renders a score for each subscale as well as an overall score; the higher the score, the more problematic the beliefs. To assess concurrent validity, the scores were related to multisource, multivariate assessments of children's adjustments that included self-report measures of anxiety, control beliefs, self-concept, social support and interpersonal problem-solving, as well as parent and teacher ratings of behaviour problems. The number of problematic beliefs varied by family structure, but not by age, gender or length of parental separation. When age was controlled for, children with many problematic beliefs were found to be anxious, have poor self-concept and little social support (Kurdek & Berg 1987 : 717). Therefore, this scale appears to be a valid measure of problematic beliefs, and the pattern of correlates indicate that children with many problematic beliefs regarding their parents' divorce could be considered at risk for psychopathology.

The Self-Perception Profile For Children (Harter 1985 : 5) is a self-report scale devised to tap 8 - 13 year old children's judgements of their competence or adequacy in five domain-specific areas : scholastic competence, social acceptance, athletic competence, physical

appearance, behavioural conduct as well as global self-worth. Harter does not adhere to the view that global self-worth is best assessed by summing responses to items which ask about a wide variety of self-descriptions. Rather, the author believes that one's feelings of worth should be tapped directly, by asking about self-worth itself. This scale bases its formulations on James' ideas that global self-esteem represents the ratio of one's successes to one's aspirations toward success in the various domains of one's life. The authors have operationalized this formulation and determined that perceived competence in domains rated as important is strongly predictive of self-worth.

The internal consistency reliabilities for all six subscales were based on Cronbach's Alpha and range from .71 to .86. Cronbach's Alpha gives an estimate of the test reliability based on item intercorrelations - a scale with high item intercorrelations is said to have high internal consistency, meaning that subjects tend to score consistently well or consistently poorly on all items. (Ghiselli, Campbell & Zedeck 1981: 193).

The model underlying The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1982 : 88) hypothesizes that children do not feel equally competent in every skill domain, and that children aged 8 and older have constructed a view of their general self-worth, over and above the 5 specific competence judgements. Therefore, this scale appears to be a valid and reliable measure of children's opinion of themselves, assessing their strengths and weaknesses, as well as a measure of their self-worth (or self-esteem). Both these constructs, self-concept and self-worth, have a decisive influence on personal adjustment.

As scores on the scale are considered continuous, the measure of central tendency chosen was the mean. Scoring the scale results in a total of six subscale means which define a given child's profile. There is also a discrepancy score which is calculated by working out the discrepancy between a child's competence judgements on The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter : 1985) and his/her judgement of the importance of each of the five domains. If the child is competent at areas judged important, then there will be little discrepancy and the child should have an accompanying self-worth score that is high. As the

present study is a thesis of limited scope, it did not measure the discrepancy score for subjects.

The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter : 1985) also includes a Teacher Rating Scale in which the teacher rates the child's actual behaviour in each of the five domains. Scoring results in a total of five subscale means, which can be compared directly to the children's scores which are calculated on the same basis.

In the present study, both The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987), and The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) as well as the Teacher Rating Scale were used to measure changes pre- and post-intervention for the experimental group, and to measure any changes during the same time period for the control group. All scoring was curtailed until the completion of the study.

1.7 Respondents

The sampling method used for the present study was **availability / convenience sampling** (non-probability)(Rubin and Babbie 1993 : 256). The researcher is employed as a school social worker in a parochial community primary school (Grade 1 - Standard 5) of 1200 children. She has been employed at this school since 1988 and as a consequence of regular classroom guidance lessons, has got to know most of the children at the school. A confidential memo was sent to all the Standard 2 teachers informing them that the researcher was planning to run a support group for children whose parents are divorced and/or remarried. The teacher was asked to supply the researcher with a list of such children in her class so that they could then be contacted individually to be offered the group programme. Teachers were assured that parental consent would then be obtained. (Children whose parents were separated, but not divorced, were not offered the group, owing to the possibility that the separation could be temporary). The researcher was given a list of 20 children in Standard 2 whose parents were divorced and/or remarried. The average age of these children was 9 years old.

Each child was individually sent a message asking him/her to come down to the school social worker's office. The researcher then explained to the child that she wanted to conduct a group for children whose parents were divorced; that she believed, from the school records, that this child's parents were divorced. She told each child that such groups had been run at the school before and that they had proved helpful to children in dealing with the many feelings that they might have about their parents' divorce. She asked the child if he was interested in such a group, and if so, she gave him a letter addressed to the custodial parent (See Appendix 3) Seventeen of the twenty children expressed interest in attending such a group. [Of the three who declined, one was emigrating at the end of the term and the other two (boys) did not explain why they did not wish to participate.]

Upon returning the signed consent forms, each child was seen for a brief discussion with the researcher, during which time some background details were sought : the child's age, whom they lived with at home, when the divorce occurred, how often they saw the noncustodial parent, whether they were currently undergoing therapy, and what issues they would like to discuss in the group. One child was engaged in therapy outside the school setting and parental permission was sought to contact the child's private psychologist to inform him/her of the child's participation in the support group; this was keenly supported by the psychologist concerned.

The children were informed that due to the numbers involved, there would be two such support groups - one (which was selected randomly) during the first term of the year and one during the second term. They were not given a choice as to the group in which they would participate. It was explained to all 17 children that some questionnaires would need to be completed before the group commenced. During the next week, four children at a time were called out of class to complete The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987) and The Self-Perception Profile For Children (Harter 1985). They seemed very happy to be completing these questionnaires and described them as "tiring but fun". It needs to be mentioned that it is not so unusual, in the context of this school environment, for children to be called from the classroom to the administrative office, and then to be re-directed either to the school social worker, or one of the other support staff.

There are remedial teachers, a teacher for a Hard of Hearing unit, and a teacher who specializes in English as a second language for foreign students. The child's final destination, when he leaves the classroom, can be kept private (as long as his teacher knows where he is) and so there is no stigma or embarrassment involved in being called out of class. It can be considered that being called out to see the school social worker is construed as extra attention of a positive kind.

After the completion of both sets of tests (above) the children were assigned to their respective groups. This was done on the basis of matching a sufficient number of boys and girls in each group, and matching children according to frequent versus infrequent contact with the noncustodial parent, as well as matching children whose noncustodial parent lived overseas. Children were not matched on length of time since the divorce, as the literature study refers to several groups for children of divorce where there was no matching or selection based on length of time since the divorce (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll and Cowen 1989 : 584; Anderson, Kinney and Gerler 1984 : 72; Crosbie-Burnett and Newcomer 1990 : 71; Cantrell 1985 : 166). It seems that it is valuable to have a mixed group in this regard so that children who are new to the experience can gain from children who have some distance from it. Kalter (1984 : 614) writes that children need to work and re-work emotionally painful aspects of divorce and post-divorce life. There were 9 children in the experimental group (6 girls and 3 boys) and 8 children in the control group (6 girls and 2 boys). The children were drawn from six different classrooms, but, owing to the matching, in each classroom there were some children from the experimental group together with some children from the control group. It was not possible to control for the effects of this. The experimental group met for 8 sessions of 1 hour's duration in the social worker's office, during the school morning.

The day after the completion of the group intervention programme for the experimental group, all 17 children again completed The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987) and The Self-Perception Profile For Children (Harter 1985). Once again, this was done in groups of four children at a time, in the social worker's office. The

children in the control group were reassured that "their" group would be conducted during the second term of the school year.

1.8 Presentation of data

The research results will be presented in two sections. The experimental and control groups will be compared on all pre-intervention measures and all post-intervention measures. The Mann Whitney U Test will be used to compare the two groups on The Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985), on the Teachers' Ratings and on The Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987). This test is used to measure whether differences occurring between the two groups are significant. (See Chapter 4 for more discussion on the Mann Whitney U Test).

Comparisons between measures taken before and after the group intervention programme will be evaluated for both the experimental and the control groups. These comparisons will be computed via the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test to evaluate the significance of any changes that occur between the first testing and the second testing. (See Chapter 4 for more discussion on the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test).

1.9 Value of the study

It is thought that this study will contribute to the development of knowledge that is both practical and useful for social workers in the field, despite some of the limitations mentioned below (See 1.10). The rising incidence of divorce means that more and more children will be at risk for the development of psychosocial problems. Group interventions for children of divorce are thought to be a valuable method of offering support, as well as a way of dealing with children's misconceptions about divorce. It is thought that the current research will contribute a systematic and structured programme of practical value to social workers who work with children. Improving and increasing the support that is available to children of divorce will help alleviate the deleterious effects of divorce and therefore facilitate children's adjustment to the changing family situation.

1.10 Limitations

The present study has several shortcomings:

1.10.1 The sample size is very small (9 children in the experimental group and 8 children in the control group) therefore generalizations from the results must be viewed with caution.

1.10.2 The sample used in the study was a White, Jewish, middle class school population and therefore the findings may not be widely applicable.

1.10.3 The expectancy effects in the wait-list condition control group are not controlled for, as both groups of children are in the same school and some are even in the same classroom. It came to the researcher's attention that children in the experimental group interacted with children in the control group, and that they discussed the content of the group intervention programme. It can be assumed that this might have had some effect on the children who were in the wait-list condition control group.

1.10.4 The teachers who completed the Rating Scale for children knew which subjects were in the experimental group and which subjects were in the control group. It can be assumed that this might have had some effect on the teachers' ratings of their pupils when they completed the Teachers' Rating Scale.

1.10.5 Another limitation of the present study was the use of standardised tests from the U.S.A. which might have limited validity as measuring tools for the South African population.

1.11 Definition of concepts

The following key concepts have been used throughout the study :

1.11.1 Divorce. This term refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage. For the purpose of this research, divorce is regarded as a process which spans the duration from the time of separation through to the period after the legal divorce. (A summary of the researcher's ideas from readings in Wallerstein 1994).

1.11.2 Self-concept. The self concept is viewed as the way an individual perceives himself and his behaviour; it is strongly influenced by the way others perceive him. (A summary of the researcher's ideas from readings in Rogers 1951).

1.11.3 Self-esteem. Self-esteem refers to the evaluation an individual makes with regard to himself; it is a personal judgement of his worthiness. (Coopersmith 1967 : 4).

1.11.4 Beliefs. Beliefs refer to the child's thoughts, and contribute to his conceptualization of a particular situation. (A summary of the researcher's ideas from readings in Kurdek & Berg 1987 and Smilansky 1992).

1.11.5 Means. The mean refers to the average level of scores in a distribution. The mean is equal to the sum of all scores in the distribution divided by the number of scores in the distribution (McCall 1970 : 38).

1.11.6 Standard deviation. The standard deviation is a measure of the average deviation of the scores from the mean. It is calculated indirectly via the average of the squared deviations from the mean, as the positive and negative deviations cancel each other out (McCall 1970 : 52).

1.11.7 Mann Whitney U Test. This non-parametric test is used to measure whether differences occurring between two groups are significant (McCall 1970 : 293).

1.11.8 Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test. This non-parametric test is used to measure the differences between the means of two related groups, to evaluate the significance of any changes occurring between the first and the second testing (McCall 1970 : 305).

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CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Incidence of divorce

Divorce seems to be ever increasing with more families affected by it each year. As family life at the end of the 20th century becomes more complex through disruptions such as divorce, separation, and remarriage, there is pressure on mental health services to respond constructively to such difficulties. Wallerstein (1994 : 100) writes that “ the startling prediction made in the early 1970s, when divorce began its steep rise, that children born in the 1980s would have a 40% chance of experiencing their parents’ divorce has long been overtaken by reality.” Yauman (1991 : 130), writing of America, describes that each year more than one million children experience the divorce of their parents.

According to the Central Statistical Service report of 1991, the number of children involved in divorce increased in South Africa from 1986 - 1990. The number of White children involved in divorce in 1986 was 18,288 as compared with 20,031 in 1990. The Central Statistical Service report of 1995 shows that the number of White children involved in divorce has remained at fairly consistent levels - 20,254 for 1991, 24,291 for 1992, 21,969 for 1993 and 20,772 for 1994. The Human Sciences Research Council considers research on divorce to be one of its top priorities (Steyn, Strijdom, Viljoen & Bosman 1987). Burman and Fuchs (1986 : 116) write that divorce rates for Whites in South Africa increased by 47% between 1978 and 1982. They predict that if rates remain the same, the probability was that “1 in 2.24 marriages would end in divorce”. (Figures are given for the White population because statistics for other population groups are described as inaccurate or inconclusive). Trends in South Africa follow those of other Western countries.

Although it was originally thought that the effects of divorce would dissipate within 1 or 2 years, the most recent longitudinal data (Wallerstein : 1994 : 104) indicate that children of divorce may continue to experience adjustment problems for as many as 10 years after the divorce. These figures represent enormous challenges to religious and educational

institutions, social service agencies and the court system for the provision of appropriate services.

2.2 Divorce as a process

Early views of divorce saw it as a short-term crisis of acute dimensions. Wallerstein (1994 : 103) writes that their work shows that divorce is not a brief, time-limited crisis but a long-term experience. Divorce is an extended process of changing family relationships, characterized by multiple stages, beginning with a period of parental conflict within the pre-divorce family.

The first stage of divorce is the **acute phase** - the period of time surrounding the marital rupture and its immediate aftermath. This period usually represents the most unhappy period of the entire lives of all the family members. At this time, men and women often behave in uncharacteristic ways - many are overwhelmed with rage and others with feelings of abandonment that can consolidate into a long-lasting depression. During this phase there is also an undermining of the parenting function. There is a decreased awareness of the child's needs, a reduced sensitivity to his feelings, less consistent discipline and a general confusion in the household routines. Wallerstein (1980) calls this phenomenon "the diminished capacity to parent " and says that it is so widespread it should be considered as an expectable divorce-related change in the parent-child relationship.

The acute stage subsides after a year or so and ushers in the **transitional stage** of the divorced family. This stage usually lasts for several years and the disequilibrium continues in a new mode as parents get involved in new relationships, new careers, new educational opportunities and sometimes relocations. The family boundaries often appear permeable at this stage as new people are included and others are excluded from the family.

The third stage of the divorce process may bring **stabilization** to the divorced family or it may herald **remarriage**. The remarried relationship is very different from the first marriage in that it carries with it the conscious memories of the initial failure, the fear of repeating that

failure, as well as the need to acknowledge the very real presence of real children from that first marriage, and the difficulties of integrating these children into a marriage that itself is hardly established.

This complex set of changes put into motion by the marital breakdown is likely to occupy a significant portion, if not all, of the child's or adolescent's growing - up years.

2.3 Children's responses to divorce

It is considered beyond the scope of this dissertation to enumerate in depth the short-term and long-term effects of divorce on children of all ages, since the present study focuses on a group intervention programme for latency-age children of divorce. Therefore, the researcher shall confine herself to the general consequences of divorce for latency-age children.

No two people experience and respond to divorce in exactly the same manner. Research has shown that children from divorced families cannot be treated as a homogeneous group or a diagnostic category (Wilkinson & Bleck 1977 : 20) Many children of divorce are well-adjusted, but might develop problems during and after divorce in reaction to uncontrollable stresses. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 : 22) write that the central event of the divorce process for children is the parental separation and subsequent departure of one parent; this often evokes similar responses to the event of death - disbelief, shock and denial. The divorce experience for a child is universally fraught with confusion, loss and insecurity. A child's feeling of security is grounded in the family context and largely depends upon his belief in the permanence of his parents' marriage. The developmental stage of the child at the time of the divorce has been related to the quantity and quality of the child's reactions. Divorce often presents as a developmental crisis in the lives of children of all ages, a phenomenon amply supported in the literature (Hetherington, Cox & Cox 1979 : Wallerstein & Kelly 1980). It has the potential for disrupting children's developmental progress as they tackle the tasks at various stages of their development. The school-age child has developmental forces which propel his focus outward and away from the family towards peer relationships and other new adult figures - but when there is a divorce in the family, his focus

alters, and the divorce necessarily affects the freedom of the child to keep his attention riveted outside the family circle.

Children experience enormous sadness at the loss of the family unit and the intensity of these losses has been shown to interfere temporarily with the emotional, social and psychological growth of children (Kelly & Wallerstein 1976; Wallerstein & Kelly 1976). For some children, the trauma causes acute adjustment problems and can leave them more vulnerable to future psychiatric problems (Hett & Rose 1991 : 39).

During the latency period (7-12 years), children exhibit many uniform emotional and behavioural reactions. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 ; 1980 : Ch 4) in their classic study of divorce identified some clearly discernible syndromes which show remarkable age consistent patterns. There were differences in response between early and later latency-age children. They referred to children age 7 - 8 as early latency and age 9 - 10 as later latency. The younger children responded with pervasive sadness, fear (of being left alone without a family or being sent to live with strangers), feelings of deprivation, fantasies of responsibility and reconciliation, and some anger (usually indirectly expressed towards teachers, friends and siblings). An intense response of this developmental stage is the yearning for the noncustodial parent. Children in this age group also experience divided loyalties, which cause them considerable pain. After 1 year, the wide spectrum of emotional responses had diminished in intensity, yet many of the children still struggled with the task of integrating divorce-related changes into their lives.

For the **later latency children**, divorce affected their ability to keep attention focused outside the family, particularly on school tasks. As mentioned above, this age child is usually influenced by social and developmental forces which drive his attention away from the family and towards peer relationships and new adult figures. Divorce disrupts this focus for the later latency-age child. Children in this age group are actively struggling to deal with conflicting feelings and trying to make sense of the disorder in which they find themselves. Their feelings include loss, rejection, helplessness, fear, loneliness and anger. These children showed conscious, intense anger (at one or both parents), fears and phobias (about being

abandoned), a shaken sense of identity, and loneliness. They were also often embroiled in loyalty conflicts; however, an alignment with one parent is not uncommon at this age. Feelings of shame emerged specifically at this age group. At the end of 1 year, the anger and hostility lingered more tenaciously than any of the other feelings and one-third of the children maintained their anger directed towards the non-custodial parent. Although most of the children in this study had come to accept the divorce with sad finality, half of the children had troubled and depressive behaviour patterns at the one-year followup. (Wallerstein & Kelly 1976; 1980).

Latency is a significant age period for personality development and for formative growth (Meyer, Moore and Viljoen 1989 : Ch 7 on Erikson). Children at this age depend heavily on both parents for nurturing, protection and control and for age appropriate identification. The stress of divorce is seen to interfere with normal developmental processes by absorbing the latency-age child's mental and emotional energy (Titkin & Cobb 1983 : 54). The latency child "fears nothing more than the upsetting of his precarious equilibrium" (Bornstein in Wallerstein 1976 : 257). Divorce disrupts the child's perception of social reality and affects the freedom of the child to keep his attention fixed outside the family circle.

Bergman-Meador and Cordell (1987 : 361) write that children experience a grieving process in divorce which is similar to the emotions of grieving in bereavement, and similarly a long-term process of adjustment occurs before acceptance takes place.

2.4 Effects of divorce on children

The most comprehensive of the longitudinal studies of divorce, conducted over 10 years by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976; 1980; 1983; 1994) found that 5 years post-divorce, one-third of the children in their study were faring well and considered themselves happy. Approximately one-third were doing reasonably well and were functioning ably in the academic sphere, whilst the final one-third of the children were depressed. After 10 years, feelings of sadness, regret, and being different remained, as did concerns about the permanence of interpersonal relationships and risks involved in one's own future marriage.

The conclusion reached was that long-term adjustment to divorce depended on factors within the family following divorce, and on the ability of the child to master a series of six hierarchical divorce-related tasks in addition to the normal developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence. It was suggested that these tasks begin at the time of separation and continue through late adolescence.

Other high-profile projects which highlight the psychological problems of children of divorce found that divorced families were characterized by more disrupted parenting and poorer parent-child relationships. Children in divorced families were more aggressive, disobedient, dependent, demanding and less affectionate than peers from intact families (Hetherington, Cox & Cox 1979). Wiehe (1984) compared 60 latency age children from divorced families to 60 children of the same age from intact families in terms of certain variables. He found that the children from divorced families had lower self-esteem, more negative attitudes towards their parents and an external locus of control orientation. Wilkinson and Bleck (1977 : 206) refer to Felner's study which showed that children of divorced families had significantly higher overall maladjustment scores, more aggression and acting-out problems than control group children.

Wallerstein (1994 : 104) writes that although many children weather the storm of divorce without long-term psychological difficulties, a large number become troubled. Children of divorce are significantly over-represented in outpatient psychiatric, and social service agencies, compared with children in the general population. The best predictors for mental health referrals for school-age children are parental divorce or the death of a parent.

Although the majority of research studies point to the negative effects of divorce on children's psychosocial functioning, there are several studies which report that divorce was not perceived by children as an overly distressing experience. Kurdek and Siesky (1980 : 97) found that the extent to which children perceived events as under their control and understood the dynamics of interpersonal relations, influenced their perception of the parents' divorce. Wiehe (1984) refers to a study by Rosen in 1977 which found many children in a sample of 92 who strongly maintained that the separation of their parents was

more beneficial than their remaining together. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 : 267) describe how some latency age children developed highly sensitive empathic responses and were able to act with compassion, caring and greater responsibility as a consequence of the parental divorce.

The conflicting findings on the effects of divorce on children suggest to Wiehe (1984 : 19) that the impact of divorce should not be studied in a global manner across the span of a child's developmental years, but rather relative to a specific stage of the developmental cycle and in terms of specific personality traits, such as self-esteem. Furthermore, Wiehe criticizes the methodology of many of the studies and suggests that some of the findings are problematic : many of the studies of the effects of divorce on children have failed to use control groups of children from intact families for comparison; some studies have a built-in bias of dysfunctioning as their samples are drawn from mental health clinics; many studies represent a self-fulfilling prophecy based on the researcher's own theoretical orientation, especially since it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between divorce and subsequent problems that children experience.

Hodges (1986 : 9) summarizes and critiques much of the recent research on children and divorce. He cautions against the tendency to assume that it is the separation from the non-custodial parent that is responsible for the negative effects of divorce on children. He emphasizes that divorce typically occurs in the context of a chronically unhappy marriage and it may be that chronic conflict that leads to the adjustment problems and not the divorce per se.

2.5 Self-concept and self-esteem : a clarification

Self-concept theory and research indicates that attitudes towards the self influence behaviour and provide insight into individual perceptions, needs and goals. The self-concept therefore has a key role in the integration of personality, in motivating behaviour and in achieving mental health (Swartzberg 1982 : 57). Carl Rogers' theory of personality sees the self-concept as the organizations of the perception of the self. Rogers saw behaviour as "the

goal-directed attempt of the organism to satisfy its needs as experienced in the field as perceived" (Rogers 1951 : 491). Rogers postulated a basic need for positive regard from others, and a need for positive self-regard, which is synonymous with self-esteem and is learned through the introjection of positive regard from others.

Swartzberg (1982) writes that a large number of writers have elaborated on the self-concept or other similar self-referential terms as a major element in their theories of human behaviour and personality. However, an imprecision of terminology exists and there is confusion regarding definitions of self-referent constructs. A wide range of self terms are employed - self-concept, self-image, self-esteem, self-worth, and are sometimes used interchangeably and synonymously. The terms are so intertwined and overlapping in the literature it has been suggested that the constructs be discussed as a group. (Swartzberg 1982 : 66). However, differences between the terms **self-concept** and **self-esteem** emerge : the self-concept is viewed as the way an individual perceives himself and his behaviour, and is strongly influenced by the way others perceive him. A child learns his self-concept from others - it is formed from early social interactions with significant others and is later influenced by the perceived feedback from others. Self-esteem has been defined by Coopersmith (1967 : 4) as "the evaluation that the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self-esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds towards himself".

The self-concept seems to be the logical developmental antecedent of self-esteem. One must first form an opinion of oneself, assessing one's strengths and weaknesses (self-concept) before being able to determine the degree of satisfaction or esteem to be accorded to this self-concept (self-esteem).

Briscoe in Smilansky (1992 : 52) defines the self-image as " a collection of specific attitudes, judgements and assessments regarding one's ability, behaviour, appearance and worth as a person". It is seen as the way in which one perceives and evaluates oneself. This

researcher considers self-image and self-esteem to be similar and indistinguishable from each other.

The importance of these constructs for this research derives from the relationship between self-esteem and adjustment. Self-image can considerably affect behaviour - because it summarizes a child's own evaluation of his ability to realise his own potential, self-image has a decisive influence on personal adjustment. Self-image has consistently been shown to be a reliable measure of mental health, of the ability to cope with problems, to function under stress, to act efficiently and to form relationships with others (Smilansky 1992 : 52). Swartzberg (1982 : 68) quotes several studies which found that persons low in self-esteem were more destructive, more anxious and distressed and more prone to manifest psychosomatic symptoms than are persons with relatively higher self-esteem. These differences were thought to be due to differences of anticipation, reaction and willingness to trust and rely upon one's own judgement as a basis for action. The differences were further thought to be attributable to the self-consciousness and greater sense of self-exposure experienced by the person of low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem contributes to excessive vulnerability, high anxiety, inner tension and lack of confidence, all of which interfere with the formation of interpersonal relationships.

2.5.1 Self-concept and latency age children

It has been conventionally accepted that parents are the major sources of the young child's self-concept through their position as significant others emitting salient feedback. Most self-concept theorists consider peers as an influence only in later childhood, but some studies have pointed towards the potency of peers and siblings as influences in the formation of the self-concept of young children. The latency age child operates in two worlds : that of adults (parents and teachers) and that of peers. Both worlds play a part in his development. But the importance of how his friends see him increasingly colours his view of himself. During this age, the importance of adults as shapers of attitudes diminishes and what the child's peers think of him assumes increasing significance. Concepts of self are developed or

reaffirmed in the child's efforts to gain a place in the peer group and in the attempt to get recognition from his peers. An individual's self-concept may be regarded as the result of conscious and/or unconscious comparisons with one or more reference group. During the latency phase, the peer group can be considered as the predominant reference group for children, with considerable impact on self-concept. Latency age children readily turn to their peer culture and derive from it their support and identity.

2.6 Effects of divorce on self-concept and self-esteem of latency age children

Omizo and Omizo (1987 : 46) write that numerous studies have found that children of divorce tend to suffer from diminished self-concept. They speculate that this could be because many children feel guilty and blame themselves for the divorce, or feel insecure and abandoned by one or both parents (Wallerstein & Kelly 1976; Kelly & Wallerstein 1976). Older latency age children also experience an acute sense of shame about divorce, which could have an effect on their self-esteem. Toomin (in Williams, Wright & Rosenthal 1983 : 117) suggests that " the loss of inner security and self-worth through divorce is the greatest [loss] of all ". Shame and guilt feelings are seen as diminishing the child's already injured self-esteem. The separation of the parents inevitably produces feelings of insecurity in the child and this also contributes to lowering the child's self-esteem. The effects of the diminished capacity to parent (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980) together with the sense that one's parents are overburdened with their own problems can also contribute to a child's feelings of low self-worth.

Wiehe (1984 : 18) designed a study to test the hypothesis that children from divorced families will exhibit lower self-esteem than their non-divorced counterparts. This study conceptualized self-esteem as referring to a child's self-perception in 4 areas : general feelings about the self, self-perception in relation to school, peers and parents. The study found that children from divorced families had significantly lower mean scores on the social, academic and parental self-esteem scales. There were no significant differences in scores on the general self-esteem scale for the two groups. The study concluded that children from divorced families did have lower self-esteem than their counterparts from intact families.

Wyman et al (1985 : 20) conducted a study which compared 98 children from divorced families with 170 demographically similar children from intact families on measures of perceived competence, self-worth, anxiety and sources of support. The children of divorce had lower perceived cognitive competence, higher anxiety and fewer potential sources of support. However, there were no significant group differences on perceived social and physical competence or on general self-esteem. They conclude that these findings suggest that divorce does not have an equally negative impact on all aspects of self-perception for this age group (9 - 12 year old children). Wyman et al (1985 : 24) write that these findings are consistent with previous research by Berg and Kelly in 1979 and Hainline and Feig in 1978 who found no differences between children of divorced and intact families in their perceptions of their self-worth and control over the environment. They suggest that anxiety and perceived cognitive competence may be more sensitive to events such as parental divorce , as compared with perceived self-esteem which is shaped by many interactions reflecting diverse life experiences over long time periods, and thus self-esteem may be less affected by the marital disruption.

Cutsinger and Glick (1983 : 16) conducted a study to develop a structured group treatment model for latency-age children of divorce. Their underlying assumption was that these children would have lowered self-esteem due to the divorce process, and the focus of their intervention was to raise the level of functioning of the subjects and thereby raise their self-esteem. The findings indicate that the children in the group did not enter the intervention programme with low self-esteem. They appeared to be basically well-adjusted and scored above average on the Coopersmith self-esteem inventory.

Smilansky (1992 : Ch 3) writes that parental divorce and the questions it raises about the impermanence of love and relationships, is likely to affect a child's self-perception noticeably. When children interpret the parental departure as abandonment and rejection, or when they feel guilty and blame themselves for the divorce, their self-esteem is affected negatively. Their study of the adjustment of Israeli schoolchildren of divorced parents examined the relationship between the self-image of these children and their conceptualizations of divorce. Their results showed that higher levels of conceptualization of divorce correlated with more

positive social self-image, clearer and more defined personal identity and greater capacity for self-criticism. Wallerstein and Kelly's study (1980) also supported the positive relationship between conceptualization of divorce and personal identity and found that many children experience an identity crisis as a result of their parents' divorce. The study also showed that children who understand the reasons for and the scope of the divorce process and realise that they still belong to both parents, have fairly well-defined personal identities. In sum, children who conceptualize divorce well tend to perceive themselves positively in relation to others.

Smilansky (1992 : 11) points out that the research findings worldwide suggest that children of divorced parents are a population "at risk". Most studies which compare the adjustment of children of divorce with that of similar children from intact families have shown that the former's adjustment is significantly lower than that of the latter. She cautions however, that group (and not individual) scores were compared and that the findings therefore do **not** imply that every single child of divorce will fare worse than every single child from an intact family. Although the adjustment of children of divorced parents as a group is lower than the adjustment of matched control groups from intact families, there are children in the former group who, despite the crisis of divorce, are as well adjusted as children whose parents have not been divorced.

2.7 Effects of divorce on children in the school setting

The question of how divorce affects the performance of latency-age children in the school has become increasingly important to teachers, school counsellors and school principals, since learning is one of the central developmental tasks for all school-age children. Prior to 1976, there was no systematic research on the impact of divorce on school-age children, despite the fact that they are the largest group affected by divorce. Drake (1981 : 153) writes that fifty percent of all divorces involve children.

Since Kelly and Wallerstein's first research article (1976) it has been widely accepted that school age children of divorce are a population at risk. Their study showed that half of the latency age children of divorce suffered a noticeable decline in school performance. Later

latency age children also suffered a decline in the quality of their interaction with peers during and after parental separation, but this was not observed in early latency age children. This landmark study showed that, at the one year follow-up, three-quarters of the children whose learning had declined at the time of the parental separation had resumed their previous educational and social achievement levels. In their interview of teachers, Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 ; 1980) found that two-thirds of the children showed changes in their school behaviour after their parents' separation. The most frequently observed problems were : lowered academic achievement, anxiety (seen in restless behaviour), concentration difficulties, increases in daydreaming, sadness and depression (especially in younger children), and increased aggression on the playground (in later latency-age children). Teachers observed an increase in children seeking them out and a need for more attention, expressed by children wanting more physical proximity. It would seem that children's academic performance is lowered because it is hampered by classroom behaviours that interfere with performance and require special handling. Strained relationships with peers and teachers, and attention-seeking and acting-out behaviour do not contribute to good school performance.

It appears that there is a connection between children's responses to divorce, its effects on their school performance and on their self-concept. When children have difficulty focusing their attention and efforts outside the family (see 2.3) the frequent result is poor school performance; if these achievement problems continue, they can contribute to a poor self-concept (see 2.5). As a positive self-concept is related to so many other variables of academic, social, psychological and emotional success, the child of divorce who has negative self-evaluations is likely to have many problems in school (Omizo & Omizo 1987 : 46).

Hett and Rose (1991 : 39) describe several studies which detail the deleterious effects of divorce on school performance. They refer to a study by Hammond in 1979 which found that boys from divorced families were lower in arithmetic achievement, exhibited more distractible and acting-out behaviour and perceived their families as less happy than did boys from intact families. A school survey sponsored by the U.S. National Association of Elementary Principals showed that children from divorced families were lower in

achievement, had more discipline problems at school and were absent from school more often than children from intact families. Similar results were reported by Brown in 1980 who compared achievement, tardiness, absenteeism, discipline problems and drop-out rates for children of divorced and intact families. Hett conducted two studies (1983 & 1985) which found evidence suggesting that family separation and divorce is a factor associated with children's school-related problems. He found differences between children from divorced and intact families in academic achievement, emotional adjustment and acting-out behaviour. In the second study, teachers were asked to rate pupils along several dimensions, and more children from divorced families featured problem behaviours than children from intact families.

An interesting point noted by Kelly and Wallerstein (1976 : 29) is that there seems to be no straightforward relationship between the intensity of a child's responses at home and an observable reaction in the school setting. In more than half of the younger children in their study, teachers noted a change in behaviour sufficiently striking to be reported to the researchers - in some cases, this mirrored those behaviours reported elsewhere, but for other children there was no consistency in their behaviour in different settings. Kelly and Wallerstein considered the responses in the school setting to be of sufficient importance to be included in their 3 part assessment process for children of divorce (1977 : 25).

Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 604) describe a study by Guidubaldi et al in 1983 which used a national sample of 700 children from divorced and intact families, and consistently found that children of divorce did less well on teacher-rated adjustment measures, measures of skill development, school attendance and performance, popularity with peers and locus of control. These differences remained when the effects of IQ, socio-economic status and parent education and occupation levels were partialled out.

It has been well established (2.3) that parental separation and divorce are related to adverse emotional effects on children; all of these effects seem to be related to impaired school adjustment and performance. This poses challenges to teachers, principals and school counsellors to offer supportive interventions for these children.

2.8 Factors relating to post-divorce adjustment

A complex set of variables determine how children react and cope with the divorce of their parents. There are individual differences in the effects of divorce on children which reflect these variables. Stolberg and Garrison (1985 : 112) delineate three classes of variables which have been shown to predict children's post-divorce adjustment :

- **parental - familial factors**
- **environmental - extrafamilial factors**
- **individual factors**

Parental - familial factors include pre-divorce marital hostility, parenting skills, the custodial parent's adjustment to the divorce and the availability of the non-custodial parent to the child. Wyman et al (1985 : 21) quote from several studies which point to factors that shape the child's post-divorce adjustment - the level of parental conflict (before, during and after the divorce), the parents' ability to resolve post-divorce anger and to provide a safe environment for the child and resume normal parenting are all related to post-divorce adjustment for their children. A key related factor is the availability of sources of support to the child. Support for adults has been found to relate to good post-divorce adjustment ; such support for parents has been shown to relate **both** to the child's post-divorce adjustment and to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 58) found that children's divorce adjustment was significantly related to their mothers' use of social support systems, to their mothers' own adjustment, to low maternal stress levels and to low interparental conflict.

Braude (1992) in a study in South Africa of support systems for children of divorce found that children perceived their mothers as the major source of support, followed by professional helpers; the school was seen as an important source of support and potential support. Wallerstein (1983 : 231) writes that the child's resolution of the tasks of divorce (and his consequent post-divorce adjustment) is influenced by the family ambience and by adjustment within the family, by the balance of unresolved conflict, by qualified support or nonsupport of the child's struggles, and by continued deprivation or exploitation of the child.

Wiehe (1984 : 27) refers to a study by Vess, Schwebel and Moreland in 1983 which found the presence and sex of siblings, as well as the extent of post-divorce parental conflict, were mediating variables in the impact of divorce on children.

Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 49) summarize the research findings on intrafamily factors and their relationship to adjustment after divorce : adjustment problems are **unlikely** to occur if there is only minimal depletion of financial resources, low levels of interparental conflict and hostility, cooperative parenting between ex-spouses, approval and love from both parents, authoritative discipline from the custodial parent, regular visitation by the non-custodial parent and an emotional climate that encourages children to discuss divorce-related issues.

Environmental change events and time since the initial separation figure prominently in the child's adjustment. Whether a child has to move home, live in a new neighbourhood and attend a new school all influence his adjustment. The amount of stress in the family created by changing socio-economic factors and changing parental work habits also have an impact. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 49) report that several researchers have suggested that the effects of divorce on children may be related to the kind and degree of environmental change occasioned by the divorce. High degrees of change were related to children's depression, social withdrawal, aggression , delinquency, low self-esteem and problematic thoughts about divorce. Their study found that children's divorce adjustment was unrelated to the degree of environmental change, and they mention as a limitation the possibility that their middle-class sample did not endure the financial distress that frequently results from divorce. Goldman and King (1985 : 282) report on findings that, of the different socio-economic status measures, reduced family income had the most adverse effects (especially on boys).

Individual variables that predict children's post-divorce adjustment include age, sex, and emotional predisposition of the child. The child's age at the time of the parental separation identifies the developmental tasks most likely to have been interrupted by the marital dissolution. The child's pre-divorce adjustment levels and prior mastery experiences are all

thought to relate to post-divorce adjustment (Wallerstein 1983:) .The child's level of cognitive functioning and subjective perception of reality are also factors determining his reaction. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 57) report that 9-12 year olds could adjust to the divorce better if they experienced an internal locus of control and if they had good interpersonal understanding.

Wallerstein (1983 : 231) cautions however that there is no formula for determining the outcome of divorce for any particular child. There is no necessary determining relationship between the adjustments achieved by either parent and the outcome for their children. Within the same divorcing family there is considerable variation in the outcome achieved by siblings, dependent both on their particular role in the conflicted family, their individual developmental position and their psychological strengths and resourcefulness.

Wiehe (1984 : 27) suggests several other mediating variables which may have an interactive effect on the impact of divorce on children and should be considered for future research studies : the length of time since the divorce occurred, whether or not children are living in a reconstituted family, contact with either or both of the natural parents, socioeconomic status of the family and psychosocial support systems available to the family following divorce.

2.8.1. Risk factors linked to sex

Cordell and Bergman-Meador (1991 : 140) cite studies which indicate that boys tend to be more vulnerable in reaction to divorce than girls and to experience more divorce-related problems. Girls are thought to generally cope more successfully at first as well as later. It is assumed to be related to the fact that as more mothers have custody, boys often experience a diminished relationship with their key identification figure, the father. This view is supported by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) who conclude that a positive relationship with the father appeared to be more critical for boys than girls. Goldman and King (1985 : 281) refer to the consistent findings that boys from divorced families (in comparison with girls from divorced families) show high frequencies of negative acting-out including aggression,

opposition and impulsiveness. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 57) found significant sex differences in children's divorce adjustment, such that girls were better adjusted than boys.

Wallerstein (1994 : 104) found a striking delayed or sleeper effect especially among young women. Ten years after the divorce the participants in her longitudinal study continued to regard their parents' divorce as the major formative experience of their lives. They confronted the issues of adulthood with anxiety : establishing intimacy, believing in love and commitment, risking themselves in marriage. They were intensely eager to avoid divorce for themselves, and continued to think of themselves as "children of divorce".

2.8.2 Risk factors linked to age

The child's age at the time of the parental divorce significantly shapes both his cognitive understanding of the event and his coping and behavioural options. Whereas the very young child is likely to show fearfulness, behavioural regression (such as bedwetting) and concern about abandonment, the older child may be more anxious and angry and feel overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness (Wallerstein & Kelly 1976 ; 1980 ; 1983 ; 1994 ; Kelly & Wallerstein 1976). Children 9 and 10 years old tend to show a greater disruption in school performance than do children at other age levels (Wallerstein & Kelly : 1976 ; 1980).

There are contradictory research findings regarding the risk factors correlated with the child's age at the time of divorce. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 57) suggest that more detrimental effects are associated with children of younger ages, and they report that older children have fewer adjustment problems. However, they qualify this finding by suggesting that age effects may be confounded with length of parental separation in that older children may also have spent longer periods of time in a single-parent family. Wallerstein (1984 : 457) writes that " children who are very young at the marital breakup are considerably less burdened in the years to come than those who were older at the time of the divorce".

In contrast, Smilansky (1992 : 14) writes that because young children have limited social and cognitive skills and are dependent on their parents, they react more acutely than older children or adolescents. It is difficult for the younger child to assess realistically parental motives and the child's own role in the divorce process. Self-blame, expectations of reunification and possibilities of abandonment are all part of the younger child's interpretation of events.

2.8.3 Risk factors linked to parent-child relationship

Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 : 266) highlight several changes that occur in the parent-child relationship as a consequence of divorce. The later latency age child may either be propelled forward into precocious adolescence, or may develop true empathic responsiveness and increased responsibility, or may form an alignment with one parent against the other and thus lessen the age-appropriate distance between parent and child.

The latency-age child's capacity to maintain his developmental stride is related inversely to the parent's need to lean heavily on the child for emotional and social support. It was also found, one year after the divorce, that the child's ability to maintain concentration at school was very strongly linked with the custodial parent's ability to handle the children without deterioration and to protect them from the divorce turmoil (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) describe the undermining of the parenting function that occurs during the acute phase of the divorce process (see 2.2) as a widespread and expectable divorce-specific change in the parent-child relationship. There is a decreasing awareness of the child's needs, a reduced sensitivity to his feelings, greater displays of anger by the parent, less consistent discipline and a general confusion about household routines. They call this phenomenon " the diminished capacity to parent".

It would seem, as a consequence of the above, that children's needs for help with the divorce process often go unrecognised. Bonkowski, Bequette and Boomhower (1984 : 131) describe a study which discovered that only 25% of the children in divorcing families had

received any outside help during their parents' divorce. The parents had sought help for themselves at a much higher rate, with over 90% seeking at least one outside support source.

The relationship of the noncustodial parent with the child following divorce is of great significance. Cutsinger and Glick (1983 : 17) refer to two studies which indicate that the relationship of the noncustodial parent to both the former spouse and the child is a critical factor in the child's adjustment and self-esteem. They refer to research findings which report a higher rate of behaviour problems among father-absent children. They conclude that the findings of several studies suggest that a continued relationship with the noncustodial parent is important to the adjustment of the child. Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983) studied the dimensions of contact with the noncustodial parent and concluded that frequency and regularity of visitation, and amount of telephone contact were nonsignificantly related to children's divorce adjustment. What was significant to the divorced child's adjustment was the amount of time noncustodial parents spent in direct exclusive contact with them.

2.9 Divorce adjustment process : psychological tasks of the child of divorce

Wallerstein (1983 : 233) conceptualized the child's divorce adjustment process as a series of six coping tasks that are added to the customary tasks of childhood and adolescence. These tasks are conceptualized as closely interrelated, hierarchical, and following a particular time sequence. The tasks involve reorganization and readjustments for the child of divorce in order to maintain psychic integrity and development. These tasks are :

Task 1. Acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture

Task 2. Disengaging from parental conflict and distress and resuming customary pursuits

Task 3. Resolution of loss

Task 4. Resolving anger and self-blame

Task 5. Accepting the permanence of the divorce

Task 6. Achieving realistic hope regarding relationships

These tasks fall into an enfolding sequence with varying time spans attached for the accomplishment of each. Tasks 1 and 2 need to be addressed immediately at the time of the decisive separation and resolved within the first year. Tasks 3, 4 and 5 are unlikely to be resolved during the first year after separation - they extend over many years, and are worked and reworked by the child over a long period of time until they become salient together with Task 6 during adolescence.

The major impediments to an accurate and age-appropriate acknowledgement of the marital split (Task 1) are the child's fantasies of parental abandonment and disaster, and the child's fear of being overwhelmed by sadness and anger if he acknowledges the family changes. Therefore the child's need to deny is strong, and children who have not concluded this task successfully will maintain to others and to themselves a false story to explain the one parent's absence.

Wallerstein (1983 : 234) writes that "younger children are especially disadvantaged in grasping the meaning of divorce". They have a limited grasp of time, space and distance, and therefore explanations about a parent moving to Cape Town, or access being every second weekend are difficult for them to understand. Their age-appropriate difficulty in separating reality and fantasy makes them vulnerable to frightening fantasies. However, all of the children in the Wallerstein study (1983 : 235) had mastered Task 1 by the end of the first year of separation.

Task 2 involves not only disengagement from the parental orbit of conflict, but also mastery of the child's inner anxiety and depression to regain sufficient composure so as to allow normal development to continue unimpaired. This means that the second task of the child of divorce is to return to his usual activities and relationships at school and at play, with a capacity for learning and pleasure that is unaffected by the family crisis. A child who has not successfully completed Task 2 may still anxiously track all parental arguments and may be socially withdrawn, declining invitations to friends and to extra-mural sports and hobbies. A child who has dealt with Task 2 will be involved in age-appropriate pursuits, whether it be a

soccer game for the 10 year old, or an evening at the movies with other adolescents for a 15 year old.

Divorce brings multiple losses and the task of absorbing loss is possibly the single most difficult task imposed by divorce. Resolution of Task 3 often lasts many years. Children have to deal with the partial or total loss of one parent from the home, the loss of familiar daily routines, the loss of the identity and continuity of the intact family, and some of the symbols and traditions of the intact family. For some children, the losses incurred in divorce include changing schools, neighbourhoods and friends. Task 3 requires that the child mourns these multiple losses and comes to terms with the post-divorce family. A child who has not successfully completed Task 3 will be envious of his friends from intact families and might feel a sense of humiliation and powerlessness, as well as a sense of rejection and unloveability engendered by the departure of one parent from the home. Wallerstein (1983 : 238) believes that because divorce is entirely man- or woman-made and not involuntary (like bereavement), the loss is more difficult to assimilate. However Task 3 is most easily accomplished when the loss of the relationship with one parent is only partial, and when a good visiting pattern enables a close loving relationship with both parents.

Wallerstein (1983 : 238) believes that the voluntary context of divorce gives rise to anger and blame in children. This anger is likely to be intense and long-lasting and keeps children from achieving closure with regard to the divorce experience. Successful completion of Task 4 occurs when the child comes to accept the reasons that prompted the divorce and has a greater understanding of one or both parents - this is usually achieved with the growing emotional maturity of the older child or adolescent.

Acknowledging the reality of the marital split is a separate task from accepting its permanence - which is Task 5. Children in the Wallerstein and Kelly longitudinal study addressed the issue of permanence with great reluctance and over a several year period. Many years after divorce, children and even adolescents still fantasized about their parents remarrying, even though some divorced parents were already remarried to other spouses.

Wallerstein (1983 : 240) believes that the child of divorce faces a more difficult task in accepting permanence than does the child of bereavement, as seen in the tenacity of the fantasies of reconciliation. Developmental factors are important in the resolution of this task, as younger children have greater difficulty in giving up the reconciliation fantasy, than children who are older at the time of the marital split.

The most important task for the child and for society is that the ¹⁶young person is able to reach a realistic vision regarding his own capacity to love and be loved. Task 6 occupies the child of divorce during the adolescent years and is seen by Wallerstein as an additional burden to the many developmental tasks of adolescence. This last task is built on the successful negotiation of those that went before. It brings together and integrates the coping efforts of earlier years. Successful completion of this task means that the "child" of divorce is prepared to risk a loving relationship, knowing that it may fail, but with a realistic hope that it may endure and prosper.

Thus, it can be seen that Wallerstein's 6 psychological tasks for the child of divorce form a process of adjustment to the divorce that spans several years, and are linked to the developmental stage of the child.

Kalter, Pickar and Lesowitz (1984 : 622) add 5 additional tasks created by the developmental challenges posed by post-divorce living :

1. **Coping with ongoing parental disharmony (especially over child support and visitation)**
2. **Adapting to repetitive separations from each parent**
3. **Understanding realistically the possible options for changes in custody and visitation**
4. **Coming to terms with conflicts over loyalty to one parent stimulated by the other parent's dating**
5. **Establishing a developmentally adaptive relationship with either parent's new partner**

Kalter et al (1984 : 622) believe that there is as much work to be done in adapting to these post-divorce stresses as there is in coping with the disruption of the divorce itself. In this researcher's opinion, Kalter has enriched our understanding of the challenges facing the child of divorce with his exposition of these 5 additional tasks. Taken together with Wallerstein's 6 tasks, they deal with most of the adjustments and changes facing children of divorce over a period of years, as they adapt to the changing picture of their family life. When social workers deal with children whose parents are divorced, they must not only work on their coming to terms with the loss of the intact family - often, as the child becomes at ease with his changed family circumstances, he is then faced with further changes as one or both parents begin dating, or remarry, or have more children in the remarried family. Both Wallerstein and Kalter et al have a view of the divorce-adjustment process that is longitudinal and takes into account the developmental stages of children. Their expositions of the tasks facing the child of divorce are of great value to social workers and psychologists who work with children.

Smilansky (1992 : 96) writes about children's conceptualizations of divorce as part of the process of post-divorce adjustment. Good conceptualization of divorce is likely to facilitate children's emotional, cognitive and social adjustment. It appears to minimize confusion about divorce, contributing to a lowering of anxiety and freeing children to direct their energies towards adjusting to change. Good conceptualization must include understanding on both general and personal levels - the child must be able to translate the general concepts to his personal life: for example, the child must be able to translate the general idea that children do not cause their parents to divorce, into a firm understanding that he did not contribute to his parents' divorce.

Smilansky (1992 : Ch 2) postulated 5 divorce-related concepts which children need to understand in order to adjust to divorce and function adequately. These are :

- **Conceptualizing the divorce process and its consequences.**
- **Conceptualizing attachments to divorced parents.**

- **Conceptualizing the post-divorce family situation.**
- **Conceptualizing the possibility that divorced parents will remarry.**
- **Conceptualizing the child's relationship with a step-parent.**

Conceptualizing the divorce process and its consequences involves 3 separate but related concepts : understanding the reasons for divorce (and not blaming oneself), seeing divorce as a common and acceptable but not inevitable occurrence, and conceptualizing the irreversibility of divorce. It can be seen that there is much overlap between this and Wallerstein's Tasks 4, 5 and 6. Smilansky believes that when a child understands that his parents' divorce is the result of their incompatibility, and when he does not see himself as responsible for the divorce, then good conceptualization is present. This is similar to successful completion of Task 4 for Wallerstein.

Conceptualizing the attachments to divorced parents involves understanding the new family boundaries and the new ways in which a child belongs to his parents. Smilansky claims that this involves understanding that parents may divorce each other, but a child cannot divorce his parents, nor can parents divorce their children. This researcher believes that Smilansky's idea goes further than Wallerstein's Task 1 (where children acknowledge the departure of one parent from the home) and Task 3 (where children mourn the loss of the intact family) in that it recognises the need for children of divorce to conceptualize "belonging" and attachment differently.

Conceptualizing the post-divorce family situation realistically is similar to Wallerstein's Tasks 1 and 2, where children must acknowledge the reality of the marital rupture (i.e. that one parent has left the marriage and the home) and must disengage from parental conflict and resume customary pursuits. Good conceptualization of this concept means that a child understands that he will live with his mother, that he will see his father on weekends, that his father will live in a nearby apartment, that Mom will work full-time, and that he will still attend karate lessons after school on Wednesdays. The child needs to understand what will change and what will remain the same after the divorce.

Conceptualizing the possibility that divorced parents will remarry and conceptualizing the child's relationship with a step-parent deal with the issues of the family's physical and psychological boundaries and family roles. Conceptualizing a relationship with a step-parent means seeing family boundaries as more permeable than those of the original biological family. These two divorce-related concepts of Smilansky's overlap with Kalter's Tasks 4 and 5, where the child of divorce must come to terms with the parent's dating and must establish a developmentally adaptive relationship with either parent's new partner. This researcher believes that Smilansky's concepts encompass both Wallerstein and Kalter's coping tasks for children of divorce, and that they form an extremely valuable and comprehensive theoretical contribution to our understanding of the divorce adjustment process for children.

There is a connection between age, cognitive development and conceptualizations of divorce. Smilansky (1992 : 33) quotes various studies which indicate that a child's age is one of the best predictors of his ability to conceptualize and understand his parents' divorce. She firmly believes that the child requires significant adults (parents, teachers, school counsellors, other family members etc) to help him clarify concepts connected with his parents' divorce. Her study evaluated 664 children and sought to examine how parental divorce affects the way children aged 4 - 13 conceptualize divorce. The results showed significant differences between the two age groups of children, with older children conceptualizing divorce better than younger children. Even so, the level of conceptualization for the older group was far below the maximum possible. There were no significant differences between the sexes for overall conceptualization of divorce. No "critical age" at the time of parental divorce was found to be correlated either positively or negatively with the ability of a child to understand and conceptualize his parents' divorce. One significant finding was that, as time passes, children find it harder to understand how they belong to their divorced parents (a correlation between time elapsed since the divorce and conceptualization of belonging to both parents - concept 2).

2.10 Divorce adjustment and children's beliefs about divorce

How children themselves appraise divorce-related events may be an integral component of their adjustment. Previous studies of children's divorce reactions (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980) have identified several areas of concern for children whose parents are divorced. These include children's understanding of divorce as an interpersonal process, their hopes for parental reconciliation, their fears of abandonment, their assignments of blame for divorce, their fears of negative peer reactions and their negative evaluations of their parents and themselves. These themes were incorporated into the design of a children's divorce-adjustment measure by Kurdek and Berg in Kurdek (1983 : 48) called the Children's Attitudes Towards Parental Separation Inventory, later revised as the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (1987).

Kurdek and Berg (1987 : 712) consider that the study of children's beliefs and understandings of divorce are important for 3 reasons : firstly, because such a study would extend social-cognitive developmental research into an applied setting; secondly, because several studies have indicated that children's own views of divorce differ to those attributed to them by parents, and therefore parents may not be reliable sources of information about children's divorce-related thoughts and feelings; thirdly, children's appraisals of divorce-related events may affect their adjustment to the divorce. Four of Wallerstein and Kelly's six coping tasks (which make up the divorce adjustment process) centre on appraisal of divorce - acknowledging the reality of the marital rupture, resolving anger and self-blame, accepting the permanence of the divorce and achieving realistic hopes regarding one's own relationships. Other researchers have observed that children often construct problematic beliefs about both the nature of the parental divorce and their causal role in it. These "faulty" beliefs include thoughts of being abandoned by the custodial parent, expectations of peer ridicule and rejection, seeing oneself as having to hold the family together, believing that improved behaviour will lead to parental reconciliation, and blaming one parent exclusively for the divorce. If children's beliefs are causally linked to affective and behaviour disorders, then the assessment of children's beliefs regarding parental divorce will be helpful in

designing interventions to assist children in revising faulty beliefs, and so contribute to better post-divorce adjustment.

Kurdek and Siesky (1980 : 97), in a study of the relationship between child and parent perspectives on divorce, confirmed their view that children's perceptions of the divorce may greatly influence the nature of their adjustment. Favourable reactions and adjustments were seen in children who defined divorce in terms of psychological separation, who shared news of the divorce with friends, who had relatively positive evaluations of both parents, and who saw themselves as having acquired strengths and responsibilities as a result of the divorce. They concluded with the suggestion that parents' explanations of divorce should clearly indicate that the reason underlying the divorce decision has to do with the parents having grown apart from each other to such an extent that they are no longer happy living together - this approach places the focus on the parents and should indicate to the child that their incompatibility makes reconciliation unlikely.

Hodges (1986 : 26) refers to a study by Krantz et al in 1976 which evaluated the cognitive appraisals of 52 children of divorce. Those who generated more coping alternatives had fewer behaviour problems. The more adaptive the child's evaluation of the divorce, the better his postdivorce adjustment at home. Adaptive beliefs included a positive or mixed evaluation of the divorce, optimism about the future, or acceptance of the divorce. No relationship was found between adaptive beliefs and adjustment at school. Hodges cautions that it may be that the more adjusted the child, the better he can solve problems, and not the opposite way round, as Krantz et al concluded.

Cordell and Bergman-Meador (1991 : 139) analyzed children's divorce drawings and related them to coping styles and beliefs about divorce. Their study used the Children's Beliefs About Divorce Scale and showed that older children had more adaptive beliefs than younger children, with girls fearing abandonment more than boys. They drew the conclusion that this points to greater vulnerability for young children in terms of their cognitive beliefs about divorce. Kurdek and Berg (1987 : 714) also found that problematic beliefs regarding parental divorce were more frequent in young children. The longer the time since divorce,

the more adaptive were the children's beliefs about divorce. There was also some positive change in children's beliefs about divorce following participation in the group programme of Cordell and Bergman-Meador.

Roseby and Deutsch (1985 : 56) conducted a study for children of divorce which compared the effects of two different treatment interventions on children's beliefs and attitudes about the divorce, on depression and on school behaviour. Their study was based on the findings of the Kurdek study in 1981 which suggested a cognitive developmental variable that could mediate adjustment and could be modified by intervention. Other researchers have also reported that children's social-cognitive skills are significant adjustment factors in divorce (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980). An earlier study by Kurdek found that high levels of interpersonal knowledge and understanding of the divorce were significantly correlated with the child's positive adjustment. Roseby and Deutsch (1985 : 56) hypothesized that training in social role-taking and assertiveness would enhance levels of interpersonal knowledge, as measured by the child's attitudes and thoughts about the divorce (using the CAPSI - Children's Attitude Towards Parental Separation Inventory) and that enhanced interpersonal knowledge would facilitate positive adjustment in the behavioural and affective domains. The children in the cognitive social role-taking group showed significantly more positive change in their beliefs and attitudes about the divorce than the children in the placebo control group; no significant changes in depression or school behaviour were found. They concluded that a period of consolidation may be necessary for changed attitudes and beliefs to produce measurable behavioural and emotional change.

Based on a preliminary study, Smilansky (1992 : 15) assumes that the child's ability to conceptualize the divorce is responsible, to a great extent, for how each child copes longitudinally with the divorce crisis and adjusts to the new situation. Since cognitive processes influence emotional factors, the relationship between children's conceptualizations of divorce (their beliefs and thoughts) and their emotional and social functioning merits attention. Good conceptualization of divorce is likely to lower anxiety and reduce children's need to constantly examine the divorce situation, and it frees them to direct their energy towards adjusting to change. Smilansky writes that it is clear that the more realistic a child's

understanding of the post-divorce family situation, the better the adjustment will be. When a child does not understand the reality in which he lives, and cannot conceptualize it correctly, he becomes preoccupied with the effort to explain and comprehend it, and with attempts to cope with the uncertainties of his life. These efforts seriously deplete his emotional resources. Research points to the relationship between non-comprehension of the reasons for parental divorce and children's subsequent adjustment problems (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980).

The Smilansky study (1992 : 48) aimed at investigating **directly** the relationship between conceptualization of divorce and adjustment. The study designed a questionnaire for the assessment of conceptualization of divorce in children aged 4 - 13, which renders a score for each concept (see page 40 and 41 for Smilansky's concepts) plus a score for overall conceptualization of divorce. Three areas of adjustment were examined : emotional, social and scholastic. The findings show that the better a child conceptualized the divorce process, the lower was his anxiety level. Lack of certainty and lack of understanding of events connected with the divorce process arouse anxiety in children. The results also indicate that higher levels of conceptualization of divorce correlate with more positive social self-image, clearer and more defined personal identity and greater capacity for self-criticism. The data indicate that among the components of conceptualization of divorce, concepts 1 and 2 (see page 40) are the most important for emotional adjustment. Furthermore, this study found that better conceptualization of divorce contributes to the social adjustment and acceptance of children who have experienced parental divorce.

Smilansky concludes that helping both younger and older children to conceptualize divorce properly is likely to promote their emotional, social and scholastic adjustment. She believes that adult intervention near the time of divorce and shortly after the divorce can help correct distorted concepts (beliefs) about the divorce process.

2.11 Rationale for group interventions for children of divorce

As can be seen from the above, divorce is a significant stressor in the lives of children. Divorce is an extended process of change (see 2.2 on page 18) which requires much adaptation and adjustment and many factors can contribute to the outcome for children (see 2.8 on page 31). Cognitive mastery of the situation and enhanced self-understanding can help children cope with the various experiences of divorce (see 2.10 on page 43).

Scheidlinger (1984 : 574) writes that we are dealing with a philosophical shift in the mental health professions towards greater pragmatism, eclecticism and a systems orientation. This has led to less rigid application of ideologies and a differential choice of modalities for a given patient with a given problem at a given time. This has contributed to a proliferation of "therapeutic" group modalities which Scheidlinger distinguishes from group psychotherapy proper. The "therapeutic" groups are aimed at prevention, remediation and enhancement of optimal functioning; they need not be carefully balanced and are not purposefully aimed at "repair" of pathology. **Support groups** for children of divorce are considered to be such "therapeutic" groups and Scheidlinger supports the widest possible use of such short-term groups for children's developmental crises (such as divorce) in the context of mental health prevention.

Hurley, Taylor, Ingram and Riley (1984 : 266) reviewed three therapeutic models for treating children of divorce - psychodynamic, family therapy and the educational support group model. Support groups conducted either within the community or within schools are primarily preventive in nature and focus on crisis intervention as a means of preventing the development of psychopathology. They refer to the findings of Guerney and Jordon who believe that regardless of whether or not children are symptomatic and showing adjustment problems, they should be provided with support in an effort to prevent problems resulting from the crisis of divorce. They also believe that the support group format is more acceptable to most families than the therapy format, in that the latter identifies divorce with illness and pathology.

Group counseling is seen as the preferred treatment modality with latency age children, since children in this age group require peer validation to meet their developmental needs. This is thought to generate more therapeutic impact than confirmation from an adult therapist alone. This need for peer validation cannot be achieved in individual counseling. Participation in a group setting with other children of divorce is thought to alleviate some of the shame, doubt and stigma associated with parental divorce. Each group member is at a different stage of adjustment to divorce, and so, for each member there is another member who has experienced roughly the same dimension of divorce. The group process gives children the chance to view the divorce process realistically and to witness in others a variety of options for action and feeling. The divorce group is seen to offer a natural blend between the therapeutic group process and the developmental phenomenon of peer group membership. Latency age children seek self-discovery and self-affirmation through their peer-group interactions. At this age, group membership also serves to affirm their independence from adult supervision. The divorce group catalyzes peer-group interaction, based on the members' common bonds, needs, feelings and experiences (Sommenshein-Schneider & Baird 1980 : 89). Effron (1980 : 308) adds that pre-adolescents lend themselves well to group treatment as the social sphere outside the home becomes prominent, and the peer group has the power to modify a negative image of the self.

Schreier and Kalter (1990 : 59) add that group interventions are beneficial because, in addition to peer support, they provide children with a feeling of safety through numbers that facilitates freer expression than in individual treatment. Several researchers point to the pragmatic aspect of groupwork in that it enables services to be provided to a larger number of people in a limited amount of time (Scheidlinger 1984; Schreier & Kalter 1990). Cutsinger and Glick (1983 : 18) refer to the views of Edleson who believes that groupwork uses therapists' time more efficiently, and increases the probability that learned skills will be used in situations outside the group.

Pfeifer and Abrams (1984 : 23) list several additional purposes served by discussion groups for children of divorce. Groups meet the need for common experience sharing with peers; groups validate children's experience that they are facing a special adaptational challenge;

groups provide information and clarification about the process of parental divorce; groups provide a context for children to work through developmentally specific issues associated with the divorce process. In addition, groups provide a context for screening children who might need more intensive psychotherapy. Smilansky (1992 : 117) adds two further purposes served by support groups for children of divorce : they create an environment in which members can offer each other social support; they provide opportunities to express feelings associated with the crisis.

The Kurdek and Siesky study of adjustment to divorce (1980 : 98) found that positive adjustments and reactions to divorce were related to (among other things) children's sharing of divorce-related concerns with friends. The researchers conclude that this suggests that peers function as a support system for children experiencing their parents' divorce. As parents are likely to be preoccupied with their own turmoil about the marital disruption, children may more easily turn to friends for comfort. The researchers suggest that children who have themselves experienced divorce may be the source of greatest support in both clinical and nonclinical settings. Hammond (1981 : 392) writes that when their parents divorce, many children feel isolated from their peers who have intact families. Smilansky (1992 : 70) writes that being a child of parents who live together means being different from children whose parents have divorced. These differences are the source of social isolation for children of divorce. Support groups deal with this isolation by providing "new" group membership that is both meaningful and relevant to children.

2.11.1 Goals of group interventions for children of divorce

Cantrell (1986 ; 166) suggests some general goals for children's groups that deal with divorce. The group should be designed : to deal with the developmental responses of the children; to help children label (identify) and understand their feelings about divorce; to help children realise that others are having similar feelings and experiences; to help children gain an accurate picture of the divorce process; to assist children in learning new coping skills to deal with the feelings associated with divorce; to help children feel good about themselves and their parents. Cutsinger and Glick (1983 : 16) outline similar goals and add

that groups can help children learn new ways of communicating and coping with the feelings associated with divorce. Williams, Wright and Rosenthal (1983 : 118) developed similar intervention goals but added the following : to develop children's sense of self-worth; to assure children that they are neither bad nor alone; to allow children to express their emotions; to help children learn how to have a relationship with both parents without taking sides. (They also added goals for parents as their model includes sessions for parents based on their belief that parental involvement is a necessary element in latency age children's adjustment to divorce).

Drake (1981 : 161) outlines specific objectives for interventions : helping the child to accept the new situation eventually; adjusting to its changes; increasing the psychological distance between the parents' problems and the child's problems in order to limit the child's concerns to a more manageable level; providing the child with additional coping strategies.

Goldman and King (1985 : 286) write about several goals for school-based groups for children of divorce : to provide a protected environment in which children could develop effective coping skills in response to the family change; to lessen feelings of isolation and shame; to emphasize the supportive aspects of the school environment. Green (1978 : 34) developed multimodal groups for children geared towards helping them cope with the stress of divorce. She described a set of objectives, which overlap to a large extent with those mentioned above. However, she specifically added that groups should aim to facilitate interaction and support among children sharing the experience of divorce; to help children deal with personal relationships (friends and family); to help children change existing negative behaviour patterns to more positive ways of acting.

Smilansky (1992 : 96) sees all efforts on behalf of children of divorce as aimed at helping children to conceptualize divorce correctly. She writes that good conceptualization must be on both the general and the personal level. First the child must understand the 5 general concepts of divorce (see page 40 and 41) namely :

- divorce is a universal but not inevitable phenomenon
- it is irreversible

Smith refer to Green who describe.

check p. 40

- children are not the cause of their parents' divorce
- even after divorce, children belong to both parents
- after divorce, families may take on a new structure
- divorced parents can remarry and their children can maintain ties with biological and step-parents

Secondly, the child needs to apply the general concepts to his individual case. Smilansky believes that children need to be helped to make this transfer from the general to the personal, and they need to be helped to reach emotional acceptance of these concepts and their implications. Support groups for children of divorce are seen as promoting this.

As can be seen from the above discussion, generating goals for counseling groups is predicated on existing knowledge about children's responses to divorce, their developmental needs and factors predicting post-divorce outcomes.

Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird (1980 : 91) **caution** that the most difficult aspect of conducting groups for children of divorce is that of **setting realistic expectations**. Groups basically serve to diffuse children's feelings and offer peer-group support. They may lead to improvement in attitude, behaviour, concentration and schoolwork - however, they will not contribute to children feeling happy about the divorce, and groups will not "save" children from the discomfort of divorce. Sonnenshein-Schneider et al believe that reconciliation fantasies will tenaciously persist, even after parents might be happily remarried to other spouses; they emphasize that this does not indicate therapeutic failure, but rather the child's need to remember and maintain his roots.

2.11.2 Group process : what accounts for change in groups

Some writers believe that the essential work of the group is that of allowing children to **mourn the loss of the intact family**. Smilansky (1992 : 77) writes that mourning over the loss of family relationships in the primary family, and opposition to parents' new sexual relationships are necessary stages in the process of rebuilding after divorce. This period is characterized by anger, guilt and anxiety for children. After completing this stage, a child is

more able to accept both the divorce and the new relationships that build a new family. (Wallerstein 1994 : 102) adds that gradually, the child will be enabled to master the trauma and to resume normal developmental progress.

Groups help achieve the above goals (see 2.11.1 on page 49) and the above “work” by the following : providing information and explanations about divorce; providing social comparison, whereby a child learns that he is not the only person facing divorce crises; providing a support system to mediate the impact of stressful conditions; through mirroring, modeling and acting as a sanctuary the group helps its members to express feelings and search for optimal coping methods. It also becomes a safe place to try out new learned skills (Smilansky 1992 : 118).

There appears to be a message attached to the formation of such groups that transcends the content message of the group alone. Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird (1980 : 88) write that when a group is offered on the topic of divorce, children begin to feel that divorce is not shameful. Just being able to talk about divorce divests it of some of its negative power for children. They write about the differences in group dynamics between children’s and adults’ groups. Children’s group interactions show evidence of their egocentrism, with children attempting to top one another with their expositions; empathy is not directly expressed but rather a felt empathy exists which is based on a commonality of experience. When children tell and retell a story or event that was traumatic for them and the group’s affective response is to top it with another tale that is “worse”, the child is faced with peers who effectively validate that bad experiences are survivable.

Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 587) describe the effect of support for children - sharing intimate feelings and concerns with peers who have been through similar experiences helps children feel less isolated and different. Titkin and Cobb (1983 : 63) write that children express great relief in discovering that other children have similar feelings about divorce, thus making them feel more “normal” and accepted. Group cohesion, commitment, and trust develop as the children begin to share their “stories” and discover similarities and differences in their family situations. Farmer and Galaris (1993 : 49) indicate that groups can be helpful just by

increasing the quantity and quality of discussion and interaction among the child, family members and others in close contact during the course of the divorce.

The educational support group model is predicated on the assumption that children can be resourceful with each other and begin to work through, and at times solve, their own problems by sharing their feelings and thoughts (Pfeifer and Abrams 1984 : 24). Such groups develop a positive "family" atmosphere which becomes a safe forum for expressing feelings in the presence of a caring adult and children in similar circumstances. The groups allow affective expression and empathic sharing, but minimal conflict and rivalry occurs. This seems to be achieved by keeping the focus of attention outside of the group per se while simultaneously emphasizing the shared perspectives of group members. In Pfeifer and Abrams' groups, the children are not encouraged to interact with each other or the leaders in a way conducive to developing strong transference reactions. Rather, they are asked to focus on the task at hand, to listen, to take turns speaking and to act within the norms appropriate to the group situation. The focal material is a specially shared set of significant personal experiences to be expressed and integrated.

2.11.3 Approaches and techniques in group interventions

A number of authors have emphasized the importance of considering the child's developmental level when designing an intervention programme (Cantrell 1986; Goldman & King 1985; Kelly & Wallerstein 1977; Sonnenshein-Schneider & Baird 1980; Williams, Wright & Rosenthal 1983; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977). Cantrell points out that the focus of treatment should be oriented to the developmental stage of the child.

Sonnenshein-Schneider and Baird (1980 : 90) based their intervention programme on Piaget's theory of the development of understanding in the child - understanding and insight are achieved through the interaction of the conceptual and the concrete. The group counselor needs to anchor ideas to concrete stimuli, which helps children to "see" the point. Techniques which prove valuable are drawings, role playing, brainstorming, story books, audiotapes, movies, puppets.

Schreier and Kalter (1990 : 60) rely on displacement activities as a means to facilitate children's expression of difficult thoughts and feelings. Using puppets, story figures, drawings, or a verbalized "some kids feel" for a one-step-removed fashion, children can talk much more easily about sad and angry feelings than when they confront them directly. Cantrell (1986 : 166) believes that many children aged 6 - 8 (as reported by Kelly and Wallerstein) need some psychological distance from their own divorce situation, and so characters in books, children in films, and puppets, are used through which group members can project their own concerns.

Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 605) link items in certain sessions to the theory surrounding Wallerstein and Kelly's divorce adjustment tasks (see 2.9 on page 36). Their first three sessions have an affective component designed to catalyze expression of divorce-related feelings and the sharing of common experience. The next three sessions have a cognitive skill-building component where children are taught a sequence for resolving interpersonal problems. The next three sessions deal with anger expression and control. Tedder et al (1987 : 103) write that Wallerstein and Kelly identified three areas of need for children of divorce : feelings, cognition and problem solving. Their study designed a group experience that would address all three areas : understanding and coping with feelings, understanding what happened and why it happened, deciding what to do and when to do it.

The majority of authors reviewed in this literature study incorporated structured activities in their groups to "guide and shape the boundless energy of latency age children" (Hammond 1981 : 59). Such structured activities are seen as ice-breakers and as stimulus activities for discussion; they also stimulate self-disclosure and provide a less threatening atmosphere for children. The structured activities include bibliotherapy (where sections of relevant books are read and discussed in the group), videos and movies, board games, drawings, role-playing, skits and puppets. Developmental level and age-appropriateness must be considered in the selection of structured activities.

One intervention programme focused on the creation and production of a filmstrip on divorce, where the group members wrote the script and acted the parts for the filmstrip

(Bowker 1982 : 126). Another intervention programme (Mervis 1989 : 16) culminated in a video that group members wrote and starred in.

2.11.4 Attending to the positive aspects

A number of authors stressed the importance of attending to the positive aspects of the divorce (Bonkowski et al 1984; Cantrell 1986; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977; Smilansky 1992). Bonkowski writes that the intervention must not only help children mourn the loss of their family of origin, it must also help them to discover some positive aspects of the new family structure. Both Cantrell and Wilkinson and Bleck focus an entire session on discussing the positive things that had occurred as a result of the divorce.

2.12 Rationale for school-based group interventions

It has been well established that parental conflict and divorce are related to adverse emotional effects on the children involved (See 2.3 and 2.4 on page 19 and page 21). Among these are increased impulsivity, distractibility, aggressiveness, acting-out behaviour and overall lowered academic achievement (Kelly & Wallerstein 1977; Hetherington, Cox & Cox 1979) Drake (1981 : Ch 7) writes that it is unrealistic to assume that a child can perform well academically when the child is upset by such serious unresolved personal problems such as the divorce of his parents. In addition, the school cannot fulfil its educational function for children who are reacting to the disruption of divorce (Cantor 1977 : 184). All these factors point to the value of providing school-based interventions for children of divorce.

During the time surrounding the divorce, many parents are under tremendous stress and may not be capable or available to provide the support and guidance children need; it is argued that school professionals thus become a critical source of support, nurturance and stability (Bonkowski et al 1984; Goldman & King 1985; Pfeifer & Abrams 1984). Providing such services in the schools allows for grouping children by developmental level, normalizes the experience and allows for the development of an ongoing support system. It is also efficient because the child is already present in the setting (Drake 1981; Kalter et al 1984). Cantor

(1977 : 184) suggests the school as the site for services because of the presence of trained personnel in the form of guidance teachers, school counsellors, social workers, psychologists. Furthermore, school-age children are the largest single group of children affected by divorce (Kelly & Wallerstein 1977).

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found that schools are an important source of stability, at times the only stability, in the life of a child whose parents are divorcing. Schools provide structure and routine which can give children some security. Also, children of divorce may manifest problems in school while none are observable in the home setting (Drake 1979 : 71). It has already been suggested that children's needs often go unrecognised after divorce - the school's role is of crucial importance because it is not the divorce event, but rather the divorce process which can have developmental consequences for the child. The school is an excellent setting for observation and early intervention in that process.

Drake (1981 : 150) writes that schools are the logical resource for the child and certainly the most readily available. Access to mental health services through the schools does not have the same stigma or labeling associated with the use of outside mental health services, such as child guidance clinics, hospitals etc. Kalter et al (1984 : 614) emphasize that the school setting is a natural environment in which to reach and engage a large percentage of the children of divorce. Locating the intervention in the familiar context of school can begin the process of normalizing the divorce experience. Mervis (1989 : 16) adds to all the above reasons a practical consideration - children spend a large part of their day at school and arranging transport and juggling schedules creates additional burdens for already overburdened families. The accessibility of school-based groups is an important consideration. Hodges (1986 : 245) emphasizes this point by claiming that parents are often willing to allow children to participate in school programmes because they involve no time, energy or money. He therefore concludes that children with less support than those who end up in private therapy may be reached by school-based programmes.

2.13 Involvement of parents and teachers

Another general recommendation proposed by many authors is that custodial parents also be involved in the treatment programme (Cantrell 1986; Cebollero, Cruise & Stollak 1987; Cordell & Bergman-Meador 1991; Freeman & Couchman 1985; Goldman & King 1985; Stolberg & Cullen in Kurdek 1983; Titkin & Cobb 1983; Williams et al 1983). These authors described programmes provided for parents in conjunction with counseling groups for the children. As parents are instrumental in affecting their child's adjustment, intervention with the primary parent in conjunction with the group intervention for the child is believed to be valuable. Kelly and Wallerstein (1977 : 31) suggested that the younger the child, the more important parent involvement is and the more extensive it should be. Williams, Wright and Rosenthal (1983 : 111) propose an intervention model that provides for parental involvement as a necessary element in latency age children's adjustment to divorce, but also allows the children psychological distance from the parents so they can focus on school and peer-oriented developmental tasks.

Several authors recommended that teachers need to receive training, education and support to deal effectively with children of divorce, and these authors described programmes designed to do so (Cantrell 1986; Goldman & King 1985).

2.14 The educational system and children of divorce

Hodges (1986 : 265) writes that school policy can make a significant impact on children of divorce. Schools have a role to play in keeping both parents involved with the child and reports and other data can be sent to both biological parents, regardless of custody. This fits with research data (see 2.8.3. on page 35) which point to a continued relationship with the noncustodial parent being important to the adjustment of the child.

Smilansky (1992 : 99) writes that schools can cultivate certain behaviour and qualities, even if these are not fostered by the children's families. Schools can influence parents because they amass prestige and power by concentrating a large number of "experts" under one roof.

She quotes from a guideline, issued by the Ministry of Education in Israel as an example of a legally binding policy. The focus is on the inclusion of each parent (both parents separately if necessary) at conference meetings with teachers, at educational activities etc. Several authors promote the training of teachers to cope with children's divorce-related problems and this training is seen as the responsibility of school mental health personnel (Smilansky 1992; Drake 1979, 1981).

Freeman and Couchman (1985 : 48) believe that schools need to respond on multiple levels to the phenomenon of family dissolution. This includes understanding the legal implications for the school system of changing family structures, intervening directly with particular children to promote coping responses, sensitizing staff to the transitional crisis of divorce and to the recognition of children in distress, and adapting curricula and classroom resource materials to take account of societal changes. Several authors agree with Freeman et al that schools must incorporate specific learning units to heighten the awareness of all students to the issue of divorce (Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer 1989).

In South Africa, the use of social workers and psychologists employed by schools has been increasing over the past few years. This growth is reflected in the formation of a School Counsellors Association which meets in Gauteng on a regular basis - members are employed both at private schools, community schools and some government (public) schools.

2.15 Research on group intervention programmes

Early small-scale preventive interventions for children of divorce lacked rigorous control and rested on subjective evaluations of efficacy (Bonkowski 1984; Bergman-Meador & Cordell 1987; Cantor 1977; Effron 1980; Magid 1977; Pfeifer & Abrams 1984; Titkin & Cobb 1983; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977). Bonkowski et al (1984 : 131) used leader's evaluations, parental assessment and feedback from children to evaluate the effects of an 8 week group intervention programme for latency age children of divorce. The evaluation methods were primarily qualitative , which the authors claim were appropriate as a method of assessing a newly designed intervention. They conclude that the intervention met the stated service

objectives. Bergman-Meador and Cordell (1987 : 371) also used subjective assessments from parents and children to gain feedback about their group intervention - the children expressed positive feelings about the group experience. Cantor (1977) also used subjective evaluations from teachers, parents and children, all of whom unanimously supported the group concept. Kalter et al (1984 : 621) used pre-post comparisons to evaluate the group intervention, but had no control group. They recommend an intervention model which emphasizes multiple brief interventions timed as close to the divorce as possible and then at subsequent nodal points in the child's development e.g. entry to school, prepuberty-early adolescence, just prior to leaving high school.

Anderson, Kinney and Gerler (1984 : 73) measured the effects of counselor-led divorce groups on children's attitudes towards divorce, classroom behaviour and academic performance. There were significant changes in two areas only - improved attitude towards divorce and improved classroom conduct grades.

Omizo and Omizo (1987 : 46) measured the effects of group counseling on children's locus of control and self-concept; some areas of self-concept were enhanced and the group appeared to be beneficial to children's internal locus of control.

Several studies have extensively evaluated the effectiveness of their intervention programmes. Stolberg and Garrison (1985 : 111) evaluated the effectiveness of their primary prevention programme - Children's Support Group (CSG). Children in the support group-alone condition improved most in self-concept, and parents in the single parents support group-alone condition improved the most in adjustment. This was one of the few studies which compared the efficacy of treatment for children only, as compared with treatment for both the custodial mother and the child simultaneously.

Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985) modified the original children's support group programme (CSG) of Stolberg and Garrison (1985) placing more emphasis on emotional support and expression. Seventy two children participated in their Children Of Divorce Intervention Programme (CODIP) with a delayed intervention group providing a control group. The

experimental group showed improvements on teacher ratings of problem behaviours and competence, and parent ratings of adjustment, and self-reported anxiety, but there was no change in general self-esteem. This study was replicated in 1986 (Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, Hightower & Guare) based on a modified version of the earlier CODIP programme and a different research design. Programme children were compared to demographically similar peers from intact families. The authors write that an important disadvantage is that this virtually assures pre-programme adjustment differences between groups, and they see the intact sample as a comparison group rather than a true control group. Children of divorce were less well adjusted than their peers before the intervention; they improved significantly after the intervention, approaching children from intact families on adjustment scores. This study seems to be more a test of the differences between the two groups of children than a test of the efficacy of the intervention programme.

More recently, Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1989 : 583) evaluated the effectiveness of a new version of CODIP (16 week group preventive intervention for children of divorce). They used child, parent, and teacher measures of adjustment and found that the experimental group improved significantly more than non-programme groups from multiple perspectives, suggesting that the group intervention enhanced children's ability to cope with parental divorce.

Many studies have used measures of children's attitudes towards divorce (beliefs) and measures of self-esteem (or self-concept) for the evaluation of the efficacy of the intervention. A study by Bornstein, Bornstein and Walters (1988 : 248) examined the effects of a group treatment programme on children's anxiety, beliefs about divorce, self-concept and conflict behaviour. Children were randomly assigned to a treatment or a wait-list control condition. Significant results were not obtained on many of the dependent measures; however, children in both groups reported an increase in parent-child conflict from pre-treatment to post-treatment. Only the experimental group displayed a substantial decrease in problem behaviours (as reported by teachers) from pre-treatment to post-treatment. The primary focus of the treatment programme was the teaching of problem-solving skills and the expression of divorce-related feelings. It was hoped that such skills

would aid children's overall adjustment. This did not prove to be the case and the researchers conclude that either insensitive measures were used to assess this, or that post-treatment assessment may have occurred too soon for changes in adjustment to manifest themselves in a measureable manner.

Another study which used a measure of children's beliefs about divorce to assess changes as a result of group intervention, was conducted by Cordell and Bergman-Meador (1991 : 139). There was some positive change in children's beliefs about divorce following participation in the group programme. However since they did not use a control group, any difference could be attributed to change over time and not to the effect of the programme.

Crosbie-Burnett and Newcomer (1990) used pre and post-test self-report instruments to measure depression, self-concept and beliefs about divorce (divorce-related cognitions) in a study using experimental and control groups. Their results showed significant positive changes in beliefs about divorce and in levels of depression, as well as an increase in perceived scholastic competence and perceived athletic competence, for the children in the experimental group following participation in a group intervention programme. However, the sample size was very small ($n = 11$).

Self-esteem and measures of behaviour and attitude were also used in the evaluation of Cutsinger and Glick's 8 week structured group treatment model (1983 : 16). The focus of the intervention was to raise the level of functioning of the subjects and thereby to raise their self-esteem, and to mitigate the acting-out behaviour of group members. It was assumed that the latency age child of divorce had a lowered self-esteem due to the divorce process. The findings indicate that the children in the group did not enter the group with low self-esteem and were not exhibiting excessive acting-out in the classroom - the children scored above average on the self-esteem inventory. The differences between the pre-test and post-test means for self-esteem were not significant, and in fact the post-test scores were lower than the pre-test for self-esteem. No significant change was indicated between the pre-test and the post-test on the teacher rating of student behaviour and attitudes. The researchers quote Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) who write that the full effects of treatment on children of

divorce cannot be measured until at least six months has lapsed following the intervention. They attribute the slight drop in self-esteem to the intervention awakening feelings in the subjects that may have been dormant. Additionally, termination may have been a factor as the post-test was administered on the last day of group meetings.

A study by Gwynn and Brantley (1987 : 161) investigated the effectiveness of an educational support group for children of divorce. The sample size was fairly large ($n = 60$) and subjects were paired for sex and time since parental separation. The group was split into an experimental group, who attended 8 group sessions and a control group who attended regular classes. Subjects completed pre- and post-test measures of depression, anxiety, divorce information and feelings about divorce. The intervention resulted in significant decreases in depression, anxiety, and negative feelings about divorce for the experimental group. The authors conclude that the group intervention can result in improved adjustment outcomes for children of divorce.

Another study which used measures of self-esteem was that conducted by Hett and Rose (1991 : 38) who examined the efficacy of a group counseling programme for children of divorce. They used fairly rigorous controls in forming experimental and control groups - the control group met with counsellors for play activities that did not address divorce issues. The purpose of the control groups was to measure attention effects. Differences were not found between groups on measures of anxiety and self-esteem. The authors suggest that the programme which encouraged the exploration and expression of feelings may heighten children's anxiety and lower their self-esteem, or that these may be very stable dimensions which resist change over a short term. There were significant improvements made by the experimental children on the locus of control scale, and these children exhibited fewer school problem behaviours following the group intervention than did their control group peers.

A significant study which measured changes in beliefs and attitudes about divorce was conducted by Roseby and Deutsch (1985 : 55). They ran two intervention groups - the one included assertiveness training and training in cognitive social role taking, while the other placebo control group provided no specific skills training. The children in the former group

showed significantly more positive changes in their beliefs and attitudes about the divorce than did the children in the placebo group. No significant changes in depression or school behaviour were found. The authors conclude that a period of consolidation may be necessary for changed attitudes and beliefs to produce measurable behavioural and emotional change. This study stands out because it is one of the few which looked at the content of the intervention programme and its effects on children of divorce.

A local study (Swartzberg 1982) evaluated the effects of a group intervention programme on the self-concept of latency-age children. The children who participated in the programme benefitted significantly more in terms of attitudinal change in a positive direction than those who experienced no intervention at all or those who experienced a non-directive programme. The first control group received a non-directive intervention programme and the second control group received no intervention at all. The experimental group was found to differ significantly from the first control group on comparisons of pre- and post-test measures of self-concept enhancement; no significant differences were found between the experimental group and the second control group (no intervention at all) on pre- and post-test measures of self-concept enhancement. The author concludes that self-concept change is a more gradual process than attitudinal change.

Overall, assessment of all these programmes seems promising. In almost all of the programmes, there has been some improvement on some of the measures chosen. Even though some of the changes in a positive direction have not proven to be scientifically significant, the feedback given by group participants, their parents, and their teachers strongly support the value of the group intervention programmes. Titkin and Cobb (1983 : 63) argue convincingly that although researchers frequently question the reliability of self-report evaluations, subjective reports warrant consideration when assessing the therapeutic value of a treatment programme. Even though some of the reported data above is not statistically quantifiable, the fact that participants, teachers and parents report the experience to be beneficial is of importance.

The present study evaluates the effect of a group intervention programme for children of divorce on their beliefs about divorce and their self-concept. The group programme offers support, encourages the expression of divorce-related feelings and teaches problem-solving skills to children of divorce. The study involves both an experimental and a control (comparison) group, and both pre- and post-intervention measures, using standardised tests, are taken. The present study does not make use of subjective evaluations.

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CHAPTER 3 **THE PRESENT STUDY**

3.1 The group intervention programme

The researcher developed the intervention programme from a study of the ample amount of literature giving details of group intervention programmes for latency-age children of divorce (Alpert-Gillis et al 1989; Anderson et al 1984; Bornstein et al 1988; Cebollero et al 1987; Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer 1989; Farmer & Galaris 1993; Green 1978; Hett & Rose 1991; Kalter et al 1984; Omizo & Omizo 1987; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen 1985; Tedder et al 1987; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977).

The group programme was structured and each session consisted of a stimulus activity followed by discussion. The intervention relied on displacement activities as a means to facilitate children's expression of difficult thoughts and feelings (Schreier & Kalter 1990 : 60). The researcher used various techniques to link concepts with concrete stimuli and to help children to "see" the point (Sonnenshein-Schneider & Baird 1980 : 90).

In Session 1, the first activity was a non-divorce related self-disclosure to help children begin talking about themselves. Children were then invited to tell whom they lived with at home, and when their parents got divorced. Expectations from the group and group rules were then discussed. The group was invited to develop a general story of a divorcing family. The aim of this first session was to begin to elicit, in the safety of a displacement, central divorce-related ideas and feelings, and to begin the process of building a sense of group. It also aimed at beginning the process of sharing, which builds support and trust.

Session 2 used a video about a divorcing family to elicit discussion on the feelings associated with divorce. Different feelings were labelled and talked about, and then each child completed a worksheet (with coloured pens) that identified his own feelings. Special attention was paid to feelings of guilt, anxiety and helplessness, as well as confusion about divorce. The video served to reassure children that the anger, depression, fear or confusion

they were feeling or might have felt was natural. There was much sharing of feelings and trust began to develop between group members.

Session 3 was based on the suggestions of Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 604) who quote several research studies which found that children of divorce are predisposed to undercontrolled aggressive behaviours, although a child's age and sex determine the specific form in which such behaviours appear. They suggest that preventive interventions should help children to identify and verbalize feelings of anger and should also help to teach appropriate ways of dealing with it. The session began with a stimulus activity of a boardgame that invited children to talk about their feelings. This was followed by an active game that dealt with the expression of angry feelings (through the popping of a balloon with one's body), and then there was a group discussion of healthy ways to deal with angry feelings.

Session 4 was based on the suggestions of Cantrell (1986 : 169) who wrote that children of divorce should be taught problem-solving skills, to deal with the powerlessness that is a dominant feeling experienced by this age group when their parents divorce. During this session, the group members discussed the various problems associated with divorce and ranked them in order of importance. They brainstormed to generate alternate solutions to the highest ranking problem. The steps of a structured problem-solving approach were taught to the group members. A role play was enacted depicting situations involving the problems and the suggested problem-solving solutions. The focus was to help children begin to feel some control and mastery in their lives.

Session 5 used a drawing activity to elicit and clarify feelings and thoughts further about divorce. It was based on suggestions made by Cantrell (1986 : 168) and Wilkinson and Bleck (1977) that children of divorce have a shaken sense of identity, and that it is helpful for them to draw a personal and individual depiction of their family. Children were asked to make a 4 division personal coat of arms in the form of a shield, with a different drawing in each section:

1. a picture of a good time they had with their family

2. a picture of an unpleasant time they had with their family
3. a picture to show why they think their parents got divorced
4. a picture of something they would like to see happening to their family in the future.

This session facilitated discussion on the misconceptions around divorce and on memories. The drawing depicting the anticipated future provoked much discussion as some children drew a picture of their parents remarrying. The group then discussed what they thought would happen if their parents were to remarry each other. There was also some discussion of remarriage to other partners, and what it is like to live in a stepfamily. The drawing of a good time they had with the family seemed most often to depict memories of past holidays. Each group member had the opportunity to "show and tell" about his drawing.

Session 6 focused on the teaching of communication skills. Children of divorce often do not discuss their feelings with their parents, in an effort not to overburden them. This session used an audiotape of a mother discussing divorce with her daughter - it modeled an open style of communication and was used as a stimulus activity for an incomplete sentence exercise. Children had to practice telling others how they feel by constructing a sentence that began "I feel upset when.....because.....". The group members were easily able to find examples of when they felt upset, but the group leader had to help them to be clear in their communication.

Session 7 aimed to help children focus on some of the pleasant and positive things that occur as a result of divorce. Several authors point to the value of this approach as being balanced, rather than only mourning the loss of the intact family (Bonkowski et al 1984; Cantrell 1986; Wilkinson & Bleck 1977; Smilansky 1992). Using magazine pictures, each child made a collage depicting pleasant outcomes of divorce. The collages were then shown to the group and discussed.

Session 8 used exercises and games to provide positive feedback to group members from other members and from the group leader, and to evaluate the group process. A summary of all the sessions was reviewed (using the balloon diagram on the wall which was completed

by group members each week) and the members were given their artwork to take home. The members were enthusiastic in their feedback to each other and evaluated the group in positive terms. They all found it beneficial, felt they had learned to trust each other and that they had learned from each others' experiences. Some children said that, before coming to the group, they had felt as though they were the only children in the whole school who had parents who were divorced, and that the group had helped them to feel supported and not so "alone". The session ended with a party where the members had refreshments together.

As can be seen from the programme content, the focus of the treatment was oriented to the developmental stage of children of 9 years of age, as emphasized by Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 : 257) who write that children in later latency struggle to deal with the conflicting feelings and fears brought on by the divorce of their parents. This age group also struggles with an acute sense of shame about divorce. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976 : 259) describe how later latency children are often galvanised into activity and play as a means of overcoming their feelings. The single feeling that distinguishes this age group from younger children is their conscious intense anger. It can be seen that the group intervention programme focuses on expression and clarification of feelings (including anger) while using the medium of organised play.

An outline of the group intervention programme developed by the researcher is presented on the following pages (69 - 80).

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 1

- TIME:** 1 hour.
- MATERIALS :** Labels for names.
White board to write story on.
Picture with 7 (empty) balloons for 7 sessions.
Paper to write down expectations.
- ICEBREAKER :** Each child must introduce himself and choose one animal that is most like him. Group leader to start off.
Each child to tell what is his favourite T.V. programme.
Each child to tell whom they live with at home, and when their parents got divorced.
- EXPECTATIONS :** Each member must discuss what they hope to get from attending the group. Leader's expectations too.
- RULES :** Try to get this from the group.
Confidentiality and trust.
Respectful listening.
Punctuality and regular attendance.
No-one has to talk and no-one's feelings are wrong.
- ACTIVITY : STORY ABOUT DIVORCE :**
1. Explain that this is a group about divorce.
 2. Today we are going to write our own story about divorce.
 3. I'll begin. It's a story about Mr and Mrs Jones who have 2 children (group members supply names and ages).
 4. Hand over the storytelling to one of the children.
 5. Let each child contribute to the story.
 6. Relate the story to group members' own experiences.
e.g. How do you think the children felt then ? What were the parents feeling then ?What do you think the children worried about

Track how they felt and ask "then what happened?"

7. Read the completed story back to the group.

SUMMING UP : Sum up the essential value and content of the session. You have all shared a lot today and had a lot to cope with during your parents' divorce. It is worth hearing from others and being able to talk about feelings.

EVALUATION : Ask for feedback about how they experienced the session.

REMINDER : Remind them about confidentiality and time and date of next session.

Session 1 was based on the model of Schreier and Kalter (1990 : 59) who used an incomplete divorce story to facilitate discussion among the children, in the safety of a displacement. This session was also based on Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 585) who emphasized fostering a supportive group environment as one of the five main goals for group programmes with children of divorce. It also used the suggestions of Bornstein et al (1988 : 249) who described the importance of confidentiality in building trust among the group participants. Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 605) used the first 3 sessions to focus on divorce-related feelings and experiences, and the incomplete story technique used by the researcher in Session 1 is designed to facilitate this, with the goal of reducing children's isolation, stigma and the feeling of being different. Kalter et al (1984 : 615) point out that the aim of this first session is to elicit, in the safety of a displacement, central divorce-related ideas and feelings - it can be seen that the incomplete story exercise is sufficiently impersonal for members to use in the first session, while setting the tone for the main topic of discussion.

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 2

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : Picture with 7 balloons for 7 sessions.

Video : Do children also divorce ?

Worksheet : Personal set of feeling gauges.

Crayons and koki pens.

ICEBREAKER : Each child to list his or her 3 favourite foods.

Group leader to ask members if there is anything from the last session they wish to comment on.

ACTIVITY : VIDEO - DO CHILDREN ALSO DIVORCE ?

Show the first 12 minutes of the video which has excerpts of the family fighting and shows how it affects the 3 children. Discuss with the group what they think each child might be feeling ?

Discuss how their own feelings about divorce are different or similar to those expressed in the film.

Can discuss what family members did that made children feel happy, sad, angry etc.

Focus on what divorce means and the feelings that can come with divorce.

ACTIVITY : PERSONAL SET OF FEELING GAUGES :

Each child to complete his/her personal set of "feeling gauges" individually.

Ask each child to select the most important feelings they have experienced during the divorce process - 3 are already labelled - members to label the rest. Ask them to colour in the intensity of each feeling - the more squares in the gauge, the stronger the feeling. Then group to discuss the worksheet.

SUMMING UP : Sum up the essential value and content of the session.

EVALUATION : Ask for feedback about how they experienced the session.

REMINDER : Time and date of next session.

Session 2 was based on the goals of Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 585) , namely to facilitate identification and expression of divorce-related feelings. As the three children in the video represented 3 different ages, it was possible for children to identify their own responses whenever "their" family divorce occurred. Anderson et al (1984 : 72) also used a filmstrip on divorce to stimulate discussion of feelings, as did Cantrell (1986 : 68) to reassure children that the feelings they are experiencing (or did experience) are natural. The feeling gauge exercise is suggested by Crosbie-Burnett and Newcomer (1989 : 159) as a way of encouraging the identification of feelings, and expressing the intensity of some feelings. Green (1978) also uses a set of feeling gauges in her programme.

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 3

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : Cards with feeling names written on them
Circular spinner
Balloons
Koki pens

WELCOME : Last week we watched a video about divorce and started to talk about the different feelings children have experienced during and after their parents' divorce. Is there anything from last week that you wish to discuss ?

ACTIVITY : FEELING GAME :

Cards with names of feelings written on them are laid out in a circle face down. Each child has a turn to spin the spinner and pick up one card. Then he / she must tell of a time when they have had that feeling. Group leader to ask what did that feeling make you do ? And then what happened ? Help the group to see the feelings, behaviour, consequences sequence.

CARDS : unhappy, lonely, helpless, angry, scared, happy, confused, sad, worried, guilty, excited.

ACTIVITY : BALLOON GAME:

Introduce this game by saying that anger is often the hardest feeling for children to deal with. Each child must think about a time when they feel angry. They must all take off their shoes. Each member is given a balloon to blow up. Each child must draw on the balloon what / who made you angry. The game is to pop the balloon without using your shoes or a pin. Can only use your body. Afterwards ask members to share how it felt for them.

SUMMING UP : Sum up the essential value and content of the session.

EVALUATION : Ask for feedback about how they experienced the session.

REMINDER : Time and date of next session.

Session 3 was based on the ideas of Bornstein et al (1988 : 249) who wrote that anger is the most common emotion experienced by children of divorce, and its expression is sometimes destructive. This session was designed to help children find harmless outlets for their anger. Dealing with anger expression and control addresses one of Wallerstein's key psychological tasks for children of divorce (See 2.9 on page 36).

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 4

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : White board and pens.

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME :

Recap from last week using the balloons summary. Ask the members if there is anything from last week that they wish to discuss.

ACTIVITY : PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH DIVORCE

Today we are going to talk about problems related to divorce - some of the problems created by the divorce. Let's make a list of as many problems as we can think of. Don't be afraid to mention any problem that comes to your mind. Each member to have a turn to describe one problem that occurs for children as a result of divorce. Group leader to write up the problems on the white board. Can prompt the list by asking children to complete the sentence : One thing that is hard about my parents' divorce is.....Group to then **RANK** the problems - let's try to decide the two or three problems most important to the group - by voting.

BRAINSTORM to generate alternate solutions to the highest ranking problem.

Write down all solutions, no matter how inappropriate. Ask group members to discuss what might happen as a result of each attempted solution i.e. to explore consequences of various solutions. Go through structured problem solving approach and teach members the steps. If there is time, can go on to same procedure with 2nd highest ranking problem.

ACTIVITY : ROLE PLAY

Divide the group into threes. Each group must role play the solution to a problem.

They can all role play the same (repetitive) solution to the problem given the highest ranking - as the experiential practice is valuable and the ranking indicates that this is a problem that affects most of them. If there is time, each group of 3 can "perform" their role play for the others.

SUMMING UP : Sum up the essential content of the session and write the summary on the picture of the balloons.

EVALUATION : Ask for feedback about how they experienced the session.

REMINDER : Time and date of next session.

Session 4 was based on the goals of Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 585) which emphasize the teaching of problem-solving skills to children of divorce, to help them cope with the new challenges they face. Bergman-Meador and Cordell (1987 : 370) also use problem-solving exercises in their groups to teach children that they are not just passive recipients of

problems, but are sometimes in a position to solve them. This session was also based on the ideas of Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 605) who conceptualized a cognitive skill-building component in their group programmes for children. Distinctions were made between problems beyond children's control and thus not solvable (e.g. parent reconciliation) and problems within children's control (e.g. ways of communicating feelings).

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 5

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : White cardboard with 4 division shields drawn on them
Kokis, crayons.

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME Recap some of what we discussed last week.
Go over last week's summary.
Recap especially for last week's absentee.

ACTIVITY : PERSONAL SHIELDS :

Today we are going to deal with the feelings and behaviours around divorce, through pictures. Each of the shields I am handing out contain 4 separate parts. I will describe what I would like you to draw for each part.

1. Draw a picture about a good time you had with your family.
2. Draw a picture about an unpleasant time you had with your family - something that happened to make you sad.
3. Draw a picture that shows why you think your parents got a divorce.
4. Draw a picture of something you would like to see happening to your family in the next year.

If any member of the group cannot do one section, can substitute with a picture of how you feel about your parents' divorce.

When everyone is finished, they must place their shields in front of them for all to see. A volunteer is then asked to share and describe his drawings to the others.

Others to describe their drawings.

- SUMMING UP :** Group leader to reflect feelings that have surfaced as a result of the sharing. Note similarities and differences where appropriate. Summarize essential content on the summary sheet of balloon pictures.
- EVALUATION :** Ask for feedback about how they experienced the session.
- REMINDER :** Time and date of next session. Only 3 sessions left.

This session was based on the goals of Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 585) which emphasize that group intervention programmes should promote understanding of divorce-related concepts and clarify divorce-related misconceptions. Discussion on the causes of divorce and the future of the family as viewed by the child help to make these clarifications. In addition, this session used the ideas of Cantrell (1986 : 168) who suggested that children should make a personal coat of arms as a way of dealing with their shaken sense of identity.

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP **SESSION 6**

- TIME :** 1 hour
- MATERIALS :** Tape deck
Tape " Mom and Dad don't live together anymore. "

INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME :

- Recap briefly for those who were absent last week.
- Remind the group only 3 more sessions.
- Remind the group re confidentiality.

ACTIVITY : LISTEN TO EXERPTS FROM TAPE :

1. Play the tape from the beginning where Kelly reads aloud from the book "Mom and Dad don't live together anymore." Explain that her mother was author of the book and they are discussing it. Play up to the section where Kelly expresses what she wishes for and wonders about.

2. Include the section where she wishes she could make them happy together. Stop the tape and discuss.
3. Move to the section where Kelly asks her Mom - why did you split up exactly ? Stop the tape and discuss.
4. Move to the discussion on problems and difficulties. " Sometimes you complain about Daddy and sometimes Daddy complains about you ". Say things about each other that Kelly doesn't like. Hard to say something to one of your parents. Feeling pulled in two different directions. Stop the tape and discuss.
5. Stop the tape at "other changes" where the mother talks about her friend Peter. Hard to tell others how you feel. Hard when they give you orders or get cross with you because you are not sure how they feel towards you, as they are not your parent. Stop the tape and discuss.

EXERCISE : I FEEL UPSET WHEN.....BECAUSE.....:

Acknowledge that it is hard to tell others how you feel. Today we are going to practice telling one parent something that makes us upset. Let each child have a turn to construct aloud a sentence beginning " I feel upset when..... because"

SUMMING UP : Sum up the essential content of the group members' discussion points.

EVALUATION : Ask the group for feedback on how they experienced the session.

REMINDER : Time and date of next session

Plan party for last session.

This session used the ideas of Bornstein et al (1988 : 249) to increase children's awareness of events that precede and/or cause various feelings; the researcher also felt it was important for children to use this understanding in their communication with others, and an exercise was developed for children to practice telling an important adult in their life when they feel upset, and what makes them upset. This session was also based on the suggestions of Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 605) who write that understanding and being able to deal effectively with problems within their control (e.g. appropriate ways of communicating feelings) increases children's sense of mastery and comfort with others and addresses one of

Wallerstein's crucial psychological tasks - disengaging from parental conflict and resuming customary pursuits (See 2.9 on page 36). This session also deals with Kalter's task of establishing a developmentally adaptive relationship with either parent's new partner (1984).

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 7

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : white cardboard, scissors, magazines, glue.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION :

Recap briefly last week's session for any members who missed. Ask for feedback from the members about the " I feel upset when" exercise - did any of them tell a parent what they were feeling ? Discuss the responses. Discuss briefly plans for party in last session.

ACTIVITY : DIVORCE COLLAGES :

Today I would like us to think about those things that have turned out to be pleasant or positive as a result of your parents divorcing - e.g. easier to have friends visit, or getting to know one of your parents better than before. Each child is to make a sentence beginning " One thing that is better since my parents' divorce is....." Then each child to make a collage using magazine pictures which depict pleasant outcomes of divorce. Cut out pictures that might stand for those situations, or draw pictures to represent situations you cannot find in the magazines. When the collages are finished, each child is to show his work and discuss it. Group leader is to reflect, clarify, and point out similarities and differences mentioned by group members.

SUMMING UP : Group leader to sum up essential content of discussion.

EVALUATION : Group leader to ask for feedback from members as to the session.

REMINDER : Only one more session left.

Plan for party.

This session is based on the ideas of Alpert-Gillis et al (1989 : 585) who emphasize that group programmes should enhance positive perceptions of self and family for the child of divorce. Cantrell (1986) and Wilkinson and Bleck (1977) both encourage a depiction of the positive aspects of divorce in their group programmes.

DIVORCE SUPPORT GROUP
SESSION 8

TIME : 1 hour

MATERIALS : Food for party

CLOSURE EXERCISE : POSITIVE FEEDBACK TO MEMBERS :

Explain what positive feedback is - telling others how you feel about them in a positive way. Be specific about what they do or what they have done that you like and tell them how it makes you feel. Ask for a volunteer to sit in the feedback chair - ask for group members to make as many positive feedback statements to the volunteer as possible. Let each group member have a turn to volunteer. Group leader to add own positive feedback comments to members.

RECAP :

Go over the summary of each session as it is written on the balloon picture.

EVALUATION :

Ask each group member to tell what they liked/ found helpful in the sessions. Ask each group member to tell what they didn't like/ found least helpful in the sessions. Ask each group member to make a sentence/ sentences " I learned that....." and to relate the things they have learned in the group. Use the written expectations of the group to discuss whether expectations have been met.

DISCUSSION ON ENDING :

Group leader to lead a discussion on ending the group and to reflect on the feelings expressed about endings. Group leader to read to the group the general feedback letter that gets sent to parents after the group has ended.

PARTY :

Group leader and members to enjoy the party food for 15 minutes before the group closes. Hand out each child's work to them - drawings, collages, shields etc. - to take home.

Session 8 was based on the model of Cutsinger and Glick (1983) where group members were asked to share positive things with each other as a way of saying goodbye, and as a way of building self-esteem (Bonkowski et al 1984) This session also used the suggestions of Wilkinson and Bleck (1977 : 211) for a "feedback chair".

After completion of the 8 session group intervention programme, a letter was sent to the custodial parent of all group participants outlining the general content and some of the themes discussed by the group (See Appendix 4).

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CHAPTER 4 **ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

The research results are presented in 3 sections :

In the first section (4.1) the experimental and control groups are compared. In the second section (4.2) comparisons between measures taken before and after the group intervention programme are evaluated for both the experimental and control groups. A discussion of results is presented in the third section (4.3).

4.1 The experimental versus the control group

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare the experimental and control groups on the following measures :

- the six subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children
- the five subscales of the Teachers' Rating Scale of Children's Actual Behaviour
- the six subscales of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale
- the total scores for the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale

Both pre-test and post-test comparisons were computed on all these measures. This non-parametric test was selected in preference to the T test for unrelated groups, its parametric equivalent, in view of the small sample sizes. The Mann Whitney U Test uses the ranks of the underlying scores rather than their actual values, and in so doing, is not subject to the effect of outlying or extreme scores. (McCall 1970 : 293) This test is used to measure whether differences occurring between the two groups are significant. A 5% level of significance is conventionally used in the Behavioural Sciences to test for differences that we assume to be real rather than chance. Differences that are significant at the 5% level of significance have a probability (at most) of spurious occurrence 5 times in a 100. In other words, if we find a difference that is significant at the 5% level, we are 95% sure that the difference we have found is a real one rather than a coincidental one. If we find a difference that is significant at the 10% level, we are 90% sure that the difference we have found is a

real one rather than a coincidental one. The 10% level of significance is accepted in the case of small sample sizes, where the tolerance for spurious differences is increased to 10 times in a 100 (Rubin & Babbie 1993 : 483). The present study makes use of the 10% level of significance in view of the small sample size ($n = 17$).

If the Mann Whitney U Test statistic is significant at the 10% level on comparing the pre-test scores of the experimental and control groups, then the pre-test difference between the two groups on the particular subscale under examination is likely (90 times out of 100) to be a real one rather than a coincidental or chance one. If pre-test comparisons between experimental and control groups were found to be significant, then post-test differences cannot necessarily be attributed to the experimental treatment, i.e. the group intervention programme, as the groups started off differently. In such situations, the magnitude of the change scores must be compared to see whether subjects in the experimental group have changed more than subjects in the control group. This analysis would take the form of pre-post test comparisons for both groups, together with an examination of the mean differences for each group. This strategy was adopted in the present study (See Tables 4.1 to 4.4).

On the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 **more realistic beliefs** about divorce are indicated by lower scores on peer ridicule and avoidance (PRA), lower scores on paternal blame (PB), lower scores on fear of abandonment (FA), lower scores on maternal blame (MB), lower scores on hope of reunification (HR) and lower scores on self blame (SB). On the Self Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 **improved self-concept** is indicated by higher scores on Scholastic Competence, higher scores on Social Acceptance, higher scores on Athletic Competence, higher scores on Physical Appearance, higher scores on Behavioural Conduct and higher scores on Global Self-worth.

A summary of the results is presented in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 for the pre- and post-intervention measures respectively (on the following pages). The means of the subscales

pre- and post-test are presented to reflect the direction of the change in scores. The standard deviations are presented as a measure of within group variability or differences.

Table 4.1

Means, Standard Deviations and Mann Whitney U Test Statistic for the experimental vs. the control groups on pre-intervention measures.

Subscale	Mean		Standard Deviations		Mann Whitney U Test Statistic
	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control	
Scholastic Competence	3.11	2.91	0.48	0.52	27.0
Social Acceptance	3.33	2.98	0.71	0.95	26.5
Athletic Competence	3.07	2.79	0.79	0.69	26.5
Physical Appearance	3.29	3.33	0.83	0.54	31.5
Behavioural Conduct	3.16	2.73	0.60	0.45	21.0
Global Self-worth	3.63	3.38	0.57	0.52	21.0
Scholastic Rating	3.15	3.21	0.96	0.94	33.5
Social Rating	3.15	2.96	0.82	0.98	34.5
Athletic Rating	2.81	2.91	0.65	0.85	33.5
Physical Rating	3.00	3.58	0.88	0.81	18.5•
Behavioural Rating	3.78	3.33	0.44	1.08	28.5
PRA ¹	1.78	1.50	0.67	0.76	27.0
PB ²	1.67	2.25	1.87	2.19	30.0
FA ³	0.22	0.75	0.44	1.39	33.0
HR ⁴	1.22	0.13	1.48	0.35	19.0•
MB ⁵	0.78	0.75	1.30	0.89	33.0
SB ⁶	0.89	1.63	1.36	1.60	24.5
Total	6.56	7.00	2.83	3.55	34.5

1 Peer Ridicule and Avoidance 2 Paternal Blame 3 Fear of Abandonment 4 Hope of Reunification 5 Maternal Blame 6 Self Blame

* $p < 0,05$

• $p < 0,10$

Table 4.2

Means, Standard Deviations and Mann Whitney U Test Statistic for the experimental vs. the control groups on post-intervention measures.

Subscale	Mean		Standard Deviations		Mann Whitney U Test Statistic
	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control	
Scholastic Competence	3.39	3.10	0.54	0.79	28.5
Social Acceptance	3.35	3.08	0.84	0.88	28.5
Athletic Competence	3.13	3.17	0.77	0.66	35.5
Physical Appearance	3.54	3.56	0.75	0.59	33.5
Behavioural Conduct	3.20	3.02	0.49	0.40	25.5
Global Self-worth	3.61	3.50	0.66	0.58	28.0
Scholastic Rating	3.18	2.92	0.82	0.92	30.0
Social Rating	3.22	2.67	0.78	0.59	24.5
Athletic Rating	2.74	2.75	0.68	0.68	34.5
Physical Rating	3.37	3.58	0.86	0.71	31.5
Behavioural Rating	3.67	3.37	0.53	0.79	27.5
PRA ¹	1.33	1.00	0.50	0.76	27.0
PB ²	1.33	2.38	1.66	2.00	26.0
FA ³	0.56	0.38	1.33	1.06	32.5
HR ⁴	0.33	0.63	0.50	1.40	34.5
MB ⁵	0.00	0.38	0.00	0.74	27.0
SB ⁶	0.89	1.13	1.54	1.13	28.5
Total	4.44	5.88	3.94	4.67	29.0

1 Peer Ridicule and Avoidance 2 Paternal Blame 3 Fear of Abandonment 4 Hope of Reunification 5 Maternal Blame 6 Self Blame

From the results of Table 4.1 and Table 4.2, it can be seen that there are no significant differences between the experimental and control groups on any measure, at the 5% level of significance. At the 10% level of significance, however, the two groups were found to differ significantly on Teacher's Ratings of Children's Physical Appearance on pre-test, with the control group scoring significantly higher than the experimental group. Also at the 10% level, it can be seen that the mean score on the Hope of Reunification subscale of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987) for the experimental group on pre-test was found to be significantly higher than that of the control group. On the other five Beliefs subscales, as well as on the total for the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987), no significant differences occurred

between the two groups at the 10% level of significance. The use of the 10% level of significance is acceptable in the case of small sample sizes (Rubin & Babbie 1993 : 483).

4.2 Pre-post test comparisons for both groups

Pre-post test comparisons were computed via the Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test for the two groups to evaluate the significance of any changes that occurred from the first testing to the second testing. This non-parametric test was used in preference to its parametric equivalent, the T Test for related groups, in view of the small sample sizes. As in the case of the Mann Whitney U Test, this test uses ranked observations rather than the actual score values, and in so doing, is not subject to the effect of outlying or extreme scores. Pre- and post-intervention means are presented to show the direction of change.

Table 4.3
Means and Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test Statistic on pre- versus post-test measures for the experimental group.

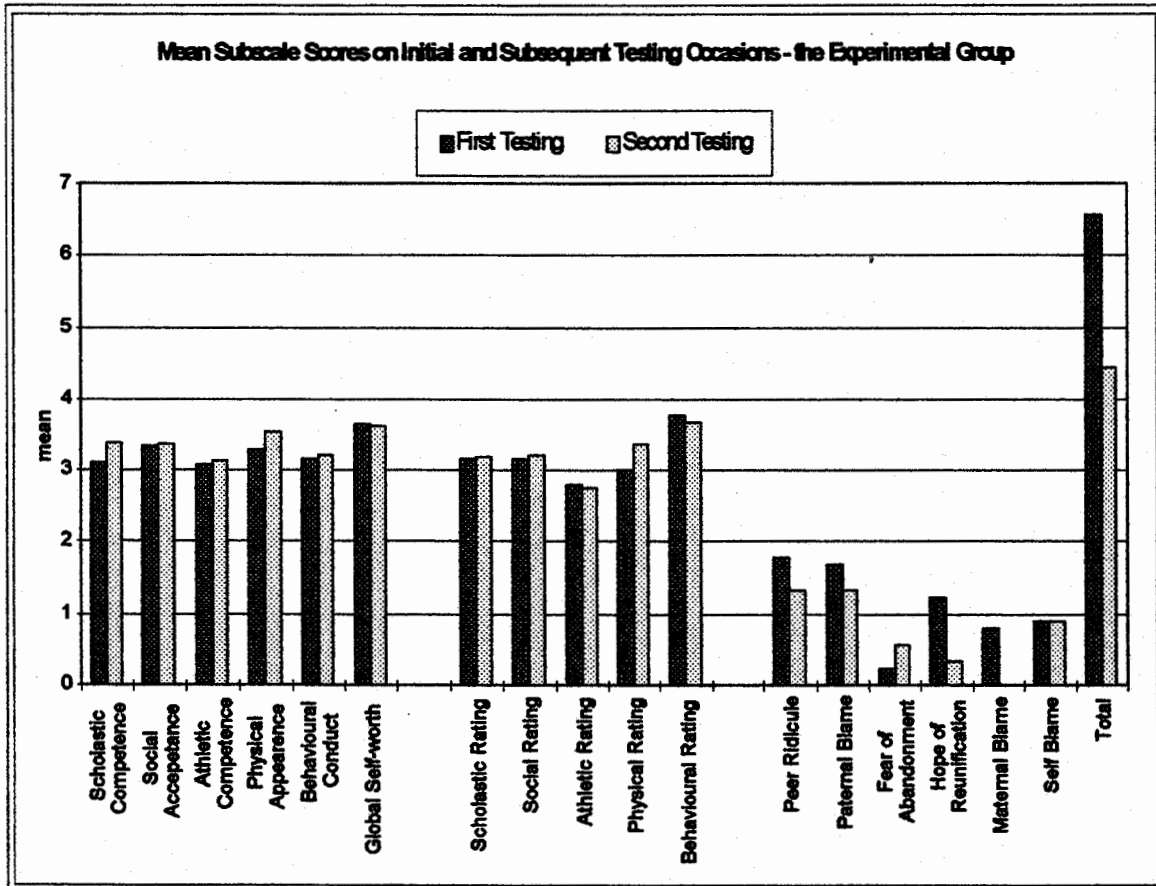
Subscale	Mean		Wilcoxon Test Statistic
	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	
Scholastic Competence	3.11	3.39	11.5
Social Acceptance	3.33	3.35	10.0
Athletic Competence	3.07	3.13	7.5
Physical Appearance	3.29	3.54	10.5
Behavioural Conduct	3.16	3.20	16.5
Global Self-worth	3.63	3.61	7.0
Scholastic Rating	3.15	3.18	8.0
Social Rating	3.15	3.22	1.0
Athletic Rating	2.81	2.74	5.0
Physical Rating	3.00	3.37	1.0
Behavioural Rating	3.78	3.67	3.5
PRA ¹	1.78	1.33	0.0
PB ²	1.67	1.33	9.0
FA ³	0.22	0.56	1.5
HR ⁴	1.22	0.33	1.5
MB ⁵	0.78	0.00	0.0●
SB ⁶	0.89	0.89	7.0
Total	6.56	4.44	9.5

1 Peer Ridicule and Avoidance 2 Paternal Blame 3 Fear of Abandonment 4 Hope of Reunification 5 Maternal Blame 6 Self Blame

* p < 0,05

● p < 0,10

Figure 4.1



* First Testing = pre-intervention. Second Testing = post-intervention.

From the results of Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1, it can be seen that the changes from pre- to post-intervention for the experimental group were not significant at the 5% level of significance. If the 10% level of significance is used, the change from the pre- to the post-intervention measures on the Maternal Blame subscale of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) is significant. The use of the 10% level of significance is acceptable in the case of small sample sizes (Rubin & Babbie 1993 : 483). This change was in the direction of a lower post-intervention mean. On the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987), in addition to Maternal Blame, the means on three other subscales (Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, Paternal Blame and Hope of Reunification) decreased post-intervention, remained the same on Self Blame and increased

on Fear of Abandonment. The mean for the total number of faulty beliefs decreased from pre- to post-intervention.

It is interesting to note that the mean scores on the Perceived Competence measures of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) increased from pre- to post-intervention on all subscales, with the exception of Global Self-worth. These changes are however non-significant. The means on the Teacher's Ratings of Children's Actual Behaviour, however, increased in the case of Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance and Physical Appearance.

Table 4.4
Means and Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Test Statistic on pre- versus post-test measures for the control group.

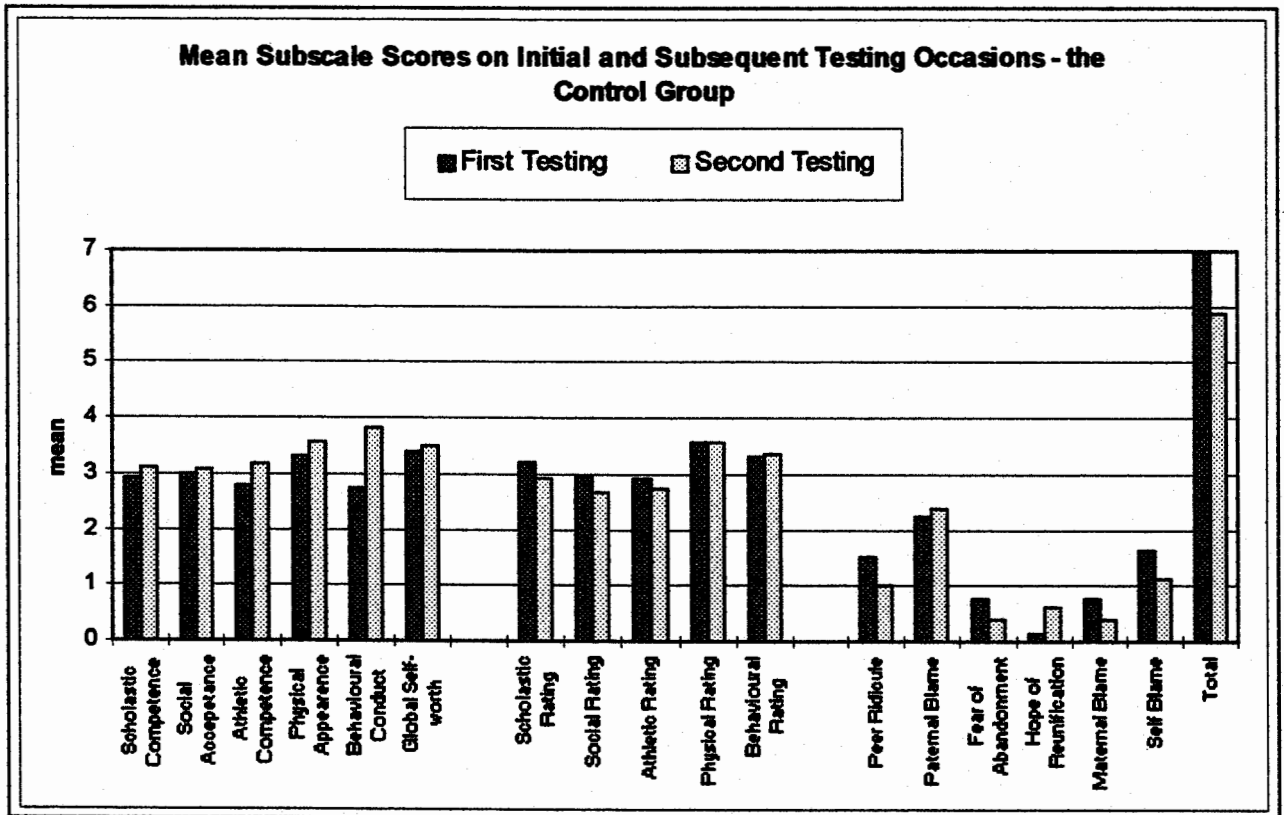
Subscale	Mean		Wilcoxon Test Statistic
	First Testing	Second Testing	
Scholastic Competence	2.91	3.10	7.5
Social Acceptance	2.98	3.08	5.5
Athletic Competence	2.79	3.17	1.0●
Physical Appearance	3.33	3.56	0.0*
Behavioural Conduct	2.73	3.02	3.0*
Global Self-worth	3.38	3.50	7.0
Scholastic Rating	3.21	2.92	9.0
Social Rating	2.96	2.67	5.0
Athletic Rating	2.91	2.75	11.5
Physical Rating	3.58	3.58	4.5
Behavioural Rating	3.33	3.37	7.5
PRA ¹	1.50	1.00	0.0●
PB ²	2.25	2.38	2.5
FA ³	0.75	0.38	1.5
HR ⁴	0.13	0.63	1.5
MB ⁵	0.75	0.38	1.0
SB ⁶	1.63	1.13	4.0
Total	7.00	5.88	6.5

1 Peer Ridicule and Avoidance 2 Paternal Blame 3 Fear of Abandonment 4 Hope of Reunification 5 Maternal Blame 6 Self Blame

* $p < 0.05$

● $p < 0.10$

Figure 4.2



* First Testing = pre-intervention. Second Testing = post-intervention.

From the results of Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2 it can be seen that significant differences were obtained between pre- and post-testings on the subscales of Physical Appearance and Behavioural Conduct of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) at the 5% level of significance, with post-test scores higher than pre-test scores. At the 10% level of significance, a significant difference can be seen on the Athletic Competence subscale, with the mean once again higher on post-test.

Means on the Scholastic Competence, the Social Acceptance and the Global Self-worth subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) also increased on post-test, but not significantly so.

The results of the Teachers' Ratings on pre-post test comparisons were not significant, with mean scores decreasing on post-test for the subscales of Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance and Athletic Competence, remaining the same for Physical Appearance, and increasing for Behavioural Conduct.

The Peer Ridicule and Avoidance post-test mean was significantly lower than pre-test at the 10% level of significance. Pre-post test comparisons on the other Belief subscales were not significant, with changes on three of the other five Belief subscales in the direction of lower post-test mean scores than pre-test. The mean scores for Paternal Blame and Hope of Reunification were higher (more faulty beliefs) at post-test than at pre-test. The mean for the total number of faulty beliefs in the control group decreased by 1,12 points compared to a decrease of 2,12 points in the case of the experimental group.

4.3 Discussion of results

The results of the present study support the researcher's contention that a group intervention programme offering support and teaching problem-solving skills to children of divorce will have an effect on children's beliefs about divorce and an effect on their self-concept. The findings presented in 4.1 and 4.2 are now examined and discussed.

4.3.1 The experimental versus the control group

Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 show that the experimental and control groups were comparable on all measures both pre-test and post-test, at the 5% level of significance.

However, at the 10% level of significance, the control group scored significantly higher than the experimental group on Teacher's Ratings of Physical Appearance, at pre-test (a mean of 3.58 against a mean of 3.00). One can surmise from this that teachers found the pupils in the control group more physically attractive than those in the experimental group, and this may have implications for their general acceptance of these children; but it has little relevance for this study. One can suggest that their seeing the control group children as more attractive

might have some effect on the ratings given to the children by the teachers on other domains, but there is no evidence to support this suggestion.

Table 4.1 shows that the experimental group had a significantly higher mean score for the belief subscale of Hope of Reunification than the control group (1.22 as compared to .13). This has implications for the adjustment of the children in the experimental group. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.10 on page 43), the way children appraise divorce-related events may be an integral part of their adjustment. If children unrealistically hope for parental reunification, and continually look for evidence of its possible occurrence, this prevents them from adjusting to the new family situation and from continuing with their developmental tasks. Wallerstein (1994 : 101) refers to the anxiety-driven tracking by the child of divorce of all family relationships, and the developmentally appropriate need for latency age children to propel their interests outwards and away from the family. Kurdek and Berg (1987 : 713) write that some children may believe that their parents' separation is temporary and that their reunification might be hastened by the child wishing for it, or by getting sick. Such beliefs can result in children's repeated disappointment.

It is interesting to note that both the children in the experimental group and the children in the control group had been living with divorced parents for time periods that ranged from 2 months to 9 years. Only two children were from families where divorce had occurred fairly recently - one child in the control group (2 months ago) and one child in the experimental group (18 months ago). The groups were not matched on length of time since divorce (See 1.8 on page 14) and this could account for a significant difference at pre-test in the number of beliefs in the subscale Hope of Reunification.

Despite the lack of matching of the groups, there were no significant differences on any measure at the 5% level of significance (at pre-test), and at the 10% level, significant differences occurred only on the Teachers' Rating of Physical Appearance of children (3.58 against 3.00) and the Hope of Reunification subscale (1.22 against 0.13) of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987). On all the other Belief

subscales, as well as the total, and on all the self-concept measures, the two groups of children were comparable and equivalent at pre-test.

At post-test the two groups of children were comparable on all measures, with no significant differences found at either the 5% or the 10% level. The experimental group was therefore not advantaged over the control group on any of these measures.

4.3.2 Pre-post test comparisons for both groups

a) The experimental group

The results on Table 4.3 and Figure 4.1 show that the changes from pre- to post-intervention for the experimental group were not significant at the 5% level of significance. However, at the 10% level, the changes in the Maternal Blame subscale of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) were significant. For example, the mean for faulty beliefs on this subscale changed from 0.78 before the group intervention programme to 0.00 after the programme. Thus, children who attended the group intervention programme placed less blame for the divorce on their mothers than they had before participating in the programme. This change has relevance for child-parent relationships post-divorce, as Kurdek and Berg (1987 : 713) write that believing one parent is entirely responsible for the separation contributes to negative interactions with that parent. Therefore, a lowering of maternal blame for the divorce can contribute to improved mother-child relationships.

The means for Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, for Paternal Blame and for Hope of Reunification decreased after the group intervention programme, from 1.78 to 1.33 (for PRA), from 1.67 to 1.33 (for PB) and from 1.22 to 0.33 (for HR), indicating fewer faulty beliefs on these subscales after the intervention. Children who believe that their parents' separation reflects negatively on them may avoid peers and this precludes them from using friends as a source of support. Fewer faulty beliefs in the subscale Peer Ridicule and Avoidance therefore has potential for improving children's relationships with their peers, while fewer faulty beliefs in the subscale Paternal Blame has relevance for child-parent

relationships (as mentioned above). Children with fewer faulty beliefs about Hope of Reunification are better able to accept the permanence of the parental separation. Children who attended the group intervention programme therefore had fewer faulty beliefs in these three areas after their participation.

The means for Self Blame for children in the experimental group remained the same after the group intervention programme (namely .89). If children believe that their parents' separation is due to something they said or did, this belief can lead to guilt or depression (Kurdek & Berg 1987 : 713). Smilansky (1992 : 96) writes that good conceptualization of divorce must include understanding on both general and personal levels. Children need to translate the general concepts about divorce to their personal individual cases. Children may know, in general, that divorce does not occur as a result of anything children do or say, but personally believing that they had nothing to do with it involves more advanced conceptualization. Children need to be helped to make this transfer from the general to the personal, and to reach emotional acceptance of these concepts. Gardner (1970 : 10) believes that giving up the responsibility of causality in their parents' divorce also means giving up the view that they have the power and control to alter the situation, and that this is difficult for children to do. Therefore, children hold on to the idea of self-blame because it also gives them hope that they can control their parents' lives and get them to marry again. It is possible that the faulty beliefs on the Self Blame subscale are slower to change, as explained by the authors above. Therefore the group intervention programme did not contribute to a decrease in faulty beliefs about self-blame.

The means for Fear of Abandonment for the children in the experimental group increased from 0.22 to 0.56 after the group intervention programme. There are several possible explanations for this. Some children come into a group intervention programme having dealt with the emotional issues around their parents divorce chiefly with denial (Wallerstein & Kelly 1976 : 258) and the open discussion about feelings, fears, and worries may raise their level of anxiety and give expression to beliefs of Fear of Abandonment which up until now had not been expressed. In addition, some of the children in the experimental group had almost no contact with the non-custodial parent (who lived in another city or overseas).

Therefore, children in the group were hearing from other children where extensive contact with one parent was lost and this could raise their fears about losing contact with their own non-custodial parent.

The mean for the total number of faulty beliefs for the experimental group decreased from 6.56 to 4.44 from pre- to post-intervention. This change was in the direction of fewer faulty beliefs after the group intervention programme.

The mean scores on the 5 subscale domains of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) all increased from pre- to post-intervention, indicating that children perceived themselves as having higher Scholastic Competence (3.39 against 3.11), higher Social Acceptance (3.35 against 3.33), higher Athletic Competence (3.13 against 3.07), higher Physical Appearance (3.54 against 3.29) and higher Behavioural Conduct (3.20 against 3.16) after the group intervention programme. Although all these changes were in a positive direction, they were not significant statistically. However, they do point to increases in the various domains of self-concept after the group intervention programme. Thus, children who participated in the programme perceived themselves as having higher competence in five areas of self-concept.

There was a small decrease in the mean for Global Self-Worth from pre- to post-testing for the experimental group, namely from 3.63 to 3.61. This concurs with Harter's view (1985 : 6) that global self-worth is not best assessed by summing the responses to an aggregate of items which ask about a wide variety of self-descriptions. Therefore, even though children's perceived competence in five areas of self-concept was raised, this did not contribute to a higher score on perceived global self-worth. Harter considers that the perceived regard of others directly impacts one's global regard for the self. Therefore it could be said that the lower mean for Global Self-Worth is an indication of children's perceptions of others' regard for them, and an indication that they might believe that their parents' separation reflects negatively on them. Other explanations of the lower global self-worth score may be that it is due to termination factors, as the post testing was administered the day after the group ended (Cutsinger & Glick 1983 : 22).

The results reflect changes on Teachers' Ratings of Children's Actual Behaviour from pre-test to post-test in the direction of higher ratings for Scholastic Competence (3.18 against 3.15), Social Acceptance (3.22 against 3.15) and Physical Appearance (3.37 against 3.00) after the group intervention programme. This treatment effect reported by teachers has implications for children's school adjustment. Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) refer to latency age children of divorce showing a noticeable decline in school performance (See 2.7 on page 28). The post-intervention scores seem to indicate that the programme contributed to children showing improved academic work. Since teachers knew whether children were in the experimental or the control group, it is not known whether such reported improvement is a treatment-related effect, or a function of knowledge that the child had participated in a divorce treatment programme. Teachers viewed children's social adjustment as improved, as well as their physical appearance, after the group intervention programme. This too could be a function of knowledge about children's participation.

The Teachers' Ratings of Children's Actual Behaviour on Athletic Competence and on Behavioural Conduct show decreased scores from pre- to post-testing (2.81 against 2.74 and 3.78 against 3.67) showing that the group intervention did not contribute to improvements in this area.

The above results are comparable to previous research studies which examined the effects of group intervention programmes on children of divorce (See 2.15 on page 58). Anderson, Kinney and Gerler (1984 : 71) in a study of the effects of divorce groups on children's classroom behaviour and attitudes towards divorce, found that divorce group participants made statistically significant changes in improved attitude towards divorce, but improved only moderately in classroom behaviour (approached significance). Cutsinger and Glick (1983 : 17) attributed the drop in self-esteem in some of their group members post-intervention to the possibility that the group programme awakened feelings in the participants that may have been dormant. They also referred to Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) who believe that the full effects of treatment on children of divorce cannot be measured until at least six months have lapsed following the intervention.

In the study by Hett and Rose (1991 : 38) no significant improvements were made in anxiety or self-esteem by any of the groups. The authors offer as an explanation that the group programme encouraged an exploration and expression of feelings, and that this may heighten children's anxiety and lower their self-esteem. This may also serve to explain the non-significant changes in the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) among participants who took part in the present study's group intervention programme. Hett and Rose also suggest that self-esteem may be a very stable dimension which resists change over a short term.

Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985 : 609) found a lack of change in self-esteem in their study and suggest that a short-term intervention programme may not be sufficiently powerful to change relatively stable dimensions such as competency and self-esteem. The authors used Harter's Perceived Competence Scale, a pre-runner to the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985). Kalter's study (1984 : 621) also found a lack of statistically significant changes on the Self- Competency Scales, and wrote that stable measures of behaviour and global personality characteristics are less likely to change in the course of an 8 week intervention than are specific perceptions about divorce. Wyman et al (1985 : 24) write that because a child's self-esteem is shaped by many interactions reflecting life experiences over long time periods, it may be less affected by marital separation than constructs such as anxiety, which are more sensitive. In the Omizo and Omizo study (1987 : 46) the authors concluded that participation in the group counselling sessions seemed to be beneficial for enhancing only some areas of self-concept.

The present study concurs with the findings of a study by Roseby and Deutsch (1985 : 55) which found that experimental group children showed significantly more positive change in their beliefs and attitudes towards divorce than did children in the placebo control group. No significant changes in depression or school behaviour were found.

The present study does not contradict the findings of Bornstein, Bornstein and Walters (1988 : 248) who examined the effects of a group treatment programme on children's anxiety,

beliefs about divorce, self-concept and conflict behaviour. Significant results were not obtained on many of the dependent measures and the researchers concluded that either insensitive measures were used or that post-treatment assessment may have occurred too soon for changes in adjustment to manifest themselves in a significantly measureable manner. The present study supports the findings of Cordell and Bergman-Meador (1991 : 139) who found some positive change in children's beliefs about divorce following participation in the group programme. The present study also supports the findings of Crosbie-Burnett and Newcomer (1990) who found significant positive changes in beliefs about divorce (and levels of depression) as well as an increase in perceived scholastic competence and perceived athletic competence for experimental group children following participation in a group intervention programme.

The present study also lends support to the findings of Swartzberg (1982) who concluded that self-concept change is a more gradual process than attitudinal change for children of divorce.

In summary, the experimental group improved on mean scores for the following subscale measures from pre- to post-intervention : Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, and Behavioural Conduct; Teacher's Scholastic Rating, Teacher's Social Rating, and Teacher's Physical Rating; Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, Paternal Blame, Hope of Reunification, and Maternal Blame.

b) The control group

The results on Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2 show that significant differences were obtained on two subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) at the 5% level of significance, namely that of Physical Appearance and Behavioural Conduct, both of which were higher on the post test scores (namely 3.56 against 3.33 and 3.02 against 2.73). At the 10% level of significance, changes from pre-test to post-test on the Athletic Competence subscale were significantly higher (namely 3.17 against 2.79).

As the control group did not participate in the group intervention programme, several explanations are offered for these changes. The control group children were very keen to participate in the group programme and, after the first testing, when children were informed as to their group allocations, it might have been surmised by these children that their allocation to a later group was due to some "failure" in the first testing. This might have influenced their performance on the second testing and contributed to higher perceived competence scores, especially on the subscale Behavioural Conduct where children are asked to rate themselves on their behaviour (results show a mean of 3.02 against 2.73 from first to second testing). This "motivation" effect can be seen in higher means for perceived Scholastic Competence (3.10 against 2.91), Social Acceptance (3.08 against 2.98) and Global Self-Worth (3.50 against 3.38) in the second testing. Thus, the control group children scored higher on all 6 subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) at the second testing (post-test). It is possible that the control group children believed that "selection" for the group intervention programme somehow depended on their scores for these tests.

Another possible explanation lies with the failure of the present study to separate the influence of the two groups on each other. Both the experimental and control group children were at the same school and some children were in the same class. It is known to the researcher that the children discussed the group intervention programme with each other. Therefore it can be assumed that the "treatment effects" were not only those that occurred in the confines of the social worker's office during the group intervention programme. The treatment effects may have occurred more widely and informally on the playground and in the classroom.

It may be said that the control group children were also part of the divorce intervention programme. They were called to the social worker's office for the initial discussion to see if they were interested in the group programme; they were asked to give a letter to their parent explaining the purpose and content of the group and asking for parental consent. This may

have begun a process of discussion at home about divorce and its effects, their feelings about divorce, and the possible benefits of a group support programme. They were then seen by the social worker to receive their signed consent forms and to participate in the first testing. Two months later, they were asked to take part in the second set of tests. All this attention could have also contributed to the changed scores for the control group children.

The results of the Teachers' Ratings for the control group on pre-post test comparisons were not significant, with mean scores decreasing on three measures (namely Scholastic rating from 3.21 to 2.92, Social Rating from 2.96 to 2.67, and Athletic rating from 2.91 to 2.75), remaining the same on one measure (Physical Rating 3.58) and increasing only on Behavioural Conduct (from 3.33 to 3.37). Since teachers had knowledge of which children comprised the experimental and control groups, these changes in the means could be a reflection of teachers' knowledge that "treatment" had not yet formally begun. It is interesting to note the concurrence of both teachers' and pupils' ratings of Behavioural Conduct - if pupils were scoring themselves higher on the perceived Behavioural Conduct subscale, and expected that it would gain them entry to the group, perhaps they also behaved better in a noticeable way, which was then reflected in the teachers' ratings of them. This has implications for future school-based group programmes.

On the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987), the children in the control group had significantly fewer faulty beliefs on the Peer Ridicule and Avoidance subscale at the second testing (namely 1.00 against 1.50). It is suggested that these children came as a "group" of children of divorce to be tested by the researcher for both the first and second testing - and that this acted as a cohesive factor in the same way as a group intervention programme might do, and that the children came to see that there were other children of divorce in the school - therefore their feelings of shame and humiliation (which contribute to the Belief subscale of Peer Ridicule and Avoidance) diminished. Pre-post test comparisons on the other Belief subscales were not significant, but the means for three other subscales were lower at the second testing (namely Fear of Abandonment 0.38 against 0.75, Maternal Blame 0.38 against 0.75 and Self Blame 1.13 against 1.63). The

mean for the total number of faulty beliefs in the control group decreased by 1,12 points at post-test, from 7.00 to 5.88. These results again suggest that children in the control group might have been influenced by the group intervention programme and the two sets of tests, even though they were not formally in the treatment programme. The mean for Paternal Blame and for Hope of Reunification was higher for the control group children at the second testing (2.38 against 2.25 for PB and 0.63 against 0.13 for HR).

In summary, the control group children improved on mean scores for the following subscale measures from pre test to post test : Scholastic Competence, Social Acceptance, Athletic Competence, Physical Appearance, Behavioural Conduct and Global Self Worth; Teacher's Behavioural Rating; Peer Ridicule and Avoidance, Fear of Abandonment, Maternal Blame and Self Blame.

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CHAPTER 5 **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1 Objectives

The objectives of the present study were (See page 6) :

5.1.1 to develop a group intervention programme which offers support and teaches problem-solving skills for children of divorce. This objective was partially fulfilled because the researcher developed an 8 session Divorce Support Group Programme based on the literature study (See outline in Chapter 3 from pages 69 - 80). However, due to the limited success of the programme, as indicated in Chapter 4, it will be necessary to make alterations to the aforementioned programme, especially in the following categories : Global Self Worth, Fear of Abandonment and Self Blame (See Table 4.3 on page 85).

5.1.2. to investigate empirically the effect of this group intervention programme on children's beliefs about divorce. This objective was fulfilled because the present study evaluated the effects of participating in the Divorce Support Group Programme on the group members' beliefs about divorce, as measured by the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987).

5.1.3. to investigate empirically the effect of this group intervention programme on children's self-concept. This objective was fulfilled because the present study evaluated the effects of participating in the Divorce Support Group Programme on the group members' self-concepts, as measured by the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985).

The main empirical findings are :

- a) at the 5% level of significance the changes from the first to the second testing for the experimental group were not significant.

- b) at the 10% level of significance, the changes for the experimental group from the first to the second testing were significant only in the Maternal Blame subscale of the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987).
- c) the mean for the total number of faulty beliefs in the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) for the experimental group decreased (i.e. improved) from the first to the second testing (from 6.56 to 4.44).
- d) the mean scores on the 5 subscale domains of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) all increased (i.e. improved) from the first testing to the second testing, although the changes were not significant statistically.
- e) at the 5% level of significance, significant differences were obtained for the control group on two subscales of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) from the first testing to the second testing, namely that of Physical Appearance and Behavioural Conduct.
- f) at the 10% level of significance, the changes for the control group from the first testing to the second testing were significant only on the Athletic Competence subscale of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985).
- g) the mean for the total number of faulty beliefs in the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) for the control group decreased (i.e. improved) from the first to the second testing (from 7.00 to 5.88).

5.2 Hypotheses

It was hypothesized in the present study that (See page 6) :

5.2.1. the group intervention programme (offering support and teaching problem-solving skills) will develop more realistic beliefs towards divorce within the children, as measured by the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek & Berg 1987) This hypothesis is largely supported because the experimental group showed lower mean scores on peer ridicule and avoidance (1.33 against 1.78), on paternal blame (1.33 against 1.67), on hope of reunification (0.33 against 1.22) and significantly lower mean scores on maternal blame (0.00 against 0.78) after participation in the group intervention programme. The

overall total score for children's beliefs was lower after the group intervention programme (namely 6.56 against 4.44) which indicates more realistic beliefs, and thus supports the hypothesis. The mean score for fear of abandonment was higher after the group intervention programme (namely 0.56 against 0.22), indicating less realistic beliefs, and thus the hypothesis is not fully supported.

5.2.2. the group intervention programme (offering support and teaching problem-solving skills) will improve the children's self-concept, as measured by the scores on the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985). This hypothesis is largely supported because the experimental group showed higher mean scores on perceived scholastic competence (3.39 against 3.11), social acceptance (3.35 against 3.33) , athletic competence (3.13 against 3.07), physical appearance (3.54 against 3.29) and behavioural conduct (3.20 against 3.16). Thus, the children who participated in the Divorce Support Group Programme perceived themselves as having higher competence in five areas of self-concept. The mean score for global self-worth was lower after the group intervention programme (3.61 against 3.63), and thus the hypothesis is not fully supported.

5.3 Research findings

The present study was intended to answer questions about some of the changes experienced by children who participated in a group intervention programme for children of divorce. The results of this study indicate that a group intervention programme offering support and teaching problem-solving skills to latency-age children of divorce can contribute towards positive changes in children's beliefs about divorce and improve their self-concepts. Participation in the Divorce Support Group Programme is associated with decreases overall in faulty beliefs and misconceptions about divorce (a mean of 4.44 against 6.56 for total beliefs), as measured by the Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale (Kurdek and Berg 1987), with a significant decrease in children blaming their mothers for the divorce (0.00 against 0.78 - significant at the 10% level). Participation in the programme is

associated with increases on all the domains of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985), with the exception of a decrease in the score for global self-worth.

The findings of the present study also indicate that treatment effects for children of divorce are not only associated with the formal, structured group intervention programme. Children in the wait-list control group also improved on the following measures (from first testing to second testing) : peer ridicule and avoidance (1.00 against 1.50, significant at the 10% level), fear of abandonment, maternal blame and self blame. The mean for the total number of faulty beliefs decreased from 7.00 to 5.88 from the first to the second testing. Children in the wait-list control group improved on all five domains of the Self-Perception Profile for Children (Harter 1985) as well as on global self-worth. Changes from first to second testing in perceived physical appearance and perceived behavioural conduct were significant at the 5% level, and changes in perceived athletic competence were significant at the 10% level. Explanations for these changes are suggested by the “motivation” effect of the wait-list control condition, by the “contamination” effect of the experimental and control groups being in the same school, and by the “attention” effect of the association with the researcher for the consent letters and both sets of testings.

The study suggests that group interventions can contribute to improved adjustment outcomes for children of divorce, by being associated with the development of more realistic beliefs about divorce and improved self-concept.

5.4 Recommendations

The researcher makes recommendations in two areas : future research and future group interventions for children of divorce.

The following recommendations are made for future research in this area :

- that the present study is replicated using a **larger sample**, as the results show an upward trend on most measures. With a larger sample, chance deviations are smaller and the results

might be significant (where the observed differences exceed chance differences). [Pre-post test comparisons (See 4.3 and 4.4 on page 85 and 87) showed some changes that were significant at the 10% level and were not significant at the 5% level].

- that the present study is replicated with an **attention control group**. Since the control group made improvements without undergoing the group intervention programme, it is possible that the results could be accounted for by attention received by the experimental group rather than by the group intervention itself (See Table 4.4 on page 87).
- that the present study is replicated with a **control group at another school** so that the influence of the control and experimental groups on each other are separated out (See page 97).
- that a **3 month follow-up assessment** be made to evaluate the efficacy of group intervention programmes, since post-treatment assessment may have occurred too soon for changes in adjustment to manifest themselves in a measurable manner, especially on such stable dimensions as global self-worth (See Table 4.3 on page 85).
- that **follow-up evaluations** of the intervention are made at **intervals of six and eighteen months**, since participants' behaviour may be erratic during treatment and change in behaviour may not be noticeable for one year or more. Time might be needed to practice learned skills before differences in behaviour appear (Refer page 63).
- that future evaluation designs include **dependent measures** in two categories : **outcome variables and process variables**. Outcome variables include such items as children's behaviour and self-concept, whereas process variables assess the degree to which group members have learned the targeted skills such as problem-solving, communication skills etc.

- that **subjective reports** by group members warrant significant consideration when assessing the therapeutic value of a treatment programme, since it is possible that the measures used to evaluate changes are insensitive to some of the internal changes that occur (Refer page 63)..

The following recommendations are made for future group intervention programmes :

- that future group intervention programmes **include the custodial parent** in a separate but parallel group programme aimed at giving information about children's responses to divorce, and aimed at dealing with single parenting issues, as previous research shows that children whose parents were simultaneously involved in intervention programmes made the best improvements (See 2.13 on page 57).
- that future group intervention programmes also **contact the non-custodial parent**, as the literature validates the importance of the non-custodial parent's relationship with the child (See 2.8.3.on page 35).
- that a **systemic approach** be undertaken, which sees the child, the family, the teacher, the class and the school system all as targets for intervention programmes dealing with the changes associated with divorce. Intervention programmes should include groups for children, education groups for parents, classroom modules, teacher training, and consultation to the school system as a whole (See 2.13 and 2.14 on page 57).
- that the **present programme be revised** and that special attention must be given to the following areas : Global Self-worth, Fear of Abandonment and Self Blame (See Table 4.3 on page 85).

5.5 Conclusion

The results of the present study indicate that a group intervention programme for latency-age children of divorce can contribute to changing their beliefs about divorce and their self-concepts. Beliefs and self-concepts are important variables in children's divorce adjustment :

a positive self-concept is related to many other variables of academic, social, psychological and emotional success, while children's beliefs about divorce are seen to affect how they cope with divorce. Interventions that assist children in revising faulty beliefs about divorce, and in improving their self-concept, contribute to better post-divorce adjustment.

The present study develops an 8 session group intervention programme for latency-age children of divorce, which has been shown to be associated with more realistic beliefs about divorce and higher self-concept for the children who participated in the programme. It is hoped that the programme, plus the findings and the recommendations outlined in this study have a practical and useful value for mental health professionals in the field. Improving and increasing the support that is available to children of divorce will help alleviate the deleterious effects of divorce and therefore facilitate children's adjustment.

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APPENDIX 1

University of Denver
Department of Psychology
List of Manuals Available

Dr Susan Harter

January, 1996

Thank you for your interest in our work. We are pleased to make the following instruments available for use in research, program evaluation, as well as educational and clinical assessment at the group or individual level. We only ask that they not be used for profit purposes.

Below is a schedule of charges that cover the costs of copying, mailing, handling, etc., for the manuals that accompany our various self-report instruments. Each manual contains the actual questionnaire, scoring key, etc., needed to administer and score the measure. In order to make the materials as readily available as possible, you are free to copy the questionnaire for your own use as many times as needed. We do not provide individual copies of forms. This statement is meant to serve as permission to use these instruments; an additional permission letter is not required from us.

1. The Self-Perception Profile for Children. \$18.00
(Harter, 1985) Ages 8 - 13.

2155 S. Race St., Denver, Colorado 80208 303.871-2478

This is an abridged version of the original correspondence.

The original correspondence is held by the researcher.

APPENDIX 2

TELEFAX

**TO : WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY U.S.A. FAX NO 513 6733301
ATTENTION : PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT
FROM : SHERYL SMITH FAX NO 27118852211
RE : THE CHILDREN'S BELIEFS ABOUT PARENTAL DIVORCE SCALE**

I am a registered social worker currently engaged in postgraduate research at the University of South Africa. I am interested in contacting the authors of the above-mentioned scale for permission to use it in my research. My proposed topic of research is "An Evaluation of a school-based group treatment programme for children of divorce". The authors are L.A. Kurdek and B. Berg (1987). Could you please redirect this fax to them if possible ? I await your reply. With thanks.

Yes, you have permission to use the scale. L. Kurdek.

This is a copy of the original.

The original correspondence is held by the researcher.

APPENDIX 3**KING DAVID JUNIOR AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS****S.A. BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION****P.O.BOX 46012 ORANGE GROVE 2119**

6 February 1996

Dear.....,

At King David we have become aware of some of the needs of Std 2 children whose parents are divorced, and we will be conducting support groups for these children this term and next term. Your child.....has expressed an interest in attending such a group.

The group sessions will allow children to meet with others of their own age where they can

- clarify their feelings about separation, divorce and remarriage
- understand that others often experience similar feelings and that they are not alone
- learn new ways of coping with the separation, divorce and/or remarriage of their parents

Stories, games and audiotapes will be used to achieve the above goals. Confidentiality of group discussions is assured at all times.

Several such support groups have been conducted at the school in the past - in our experience, these groups have been most beneficial to the children involved. This time, however, we wish to evaluate the effect or benefit to the children by administering a pre-group and post-group questionnaire to them.

Due to the numbers of children involved, there will be two such groups conducted. The first group will meet once a week for 7 sessions during the school morning from 7.45 a.m. to 8.45 a.m. on Wednesdays, commencing 14 February. Mrs. Sundry has agreed to your child's absence from prayers for the duration of the group. The second group will meet next term at the same time. Children will be notified of the starting date and which group they are in.

Please complete the consent form below and return it to us as soon as possible. Should you require any further information, please contact us at 485-1214/485-1285 (Ext 467).

Your sincerely,

MRS. SHERYL SMITH MRS BERNICE LITS MRS SANDRA BERMAN
(Social Workers).

CONSENT FORM

I hereby give my consent for my child.....to attend the divorce support group at King David Primary School, Linksfield, and for him/her to complete the evaluation questionnaire.

Name of parent.....

Child's class.....

Signed.....parent.

Date.....

APPENDIX 4**KING DAVID JUNIOR AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS****S.A. BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION****P.O.BOX 46012 ORANGE GROVE 2119**

27 March 1996

Dear.....,

Thank you for letting your child.....participate in the support group for children of divorce. We met once a week for eight sessions, each one hour duration. There were 9 children in the group, all from Std 2 at King David Primary School, Linksfield. Attendance at the group was voluntary and all the children attended regularly, except for when they were ill. There was an atmosphere of keen involvement and enthusiasm on the part of the children.

During the first session, we discussed rules and expectations of the group and the members wrote their own combined story about divorce. This included sharing some of their own feelings about divorce. It seemed very reassuring to the members to realise that they were not alone in these feelings. In the second session, we watched a video on divorce and its effects on three children in a family. The group discussed how their own feelings differed or were the same as those expressed in the video. The most commonly expressed feelings were : sad, worried, scared, confused, angry and alone. The third session continued with an exploration of feelings and the members played a card game with "feeling" cards. Discussion focused on how "inside" feelings make us act on the "outside" and on how others then act towards us (consequences). The group then played a balloon game where they had to pop balloons with their bodies as a way of dealing with angry feelings. This proved to be a lot of fun.

The fourth session focused on problems related to divorce. The problem ranked by children as the most important was when one parent lives far away and is not in frequent contact with the child. The other problem ranked as highly important by the group was "feeling you have to take sides when parents fight, even after the divorce". We learned problem solving steps and strategies to deal with some of these problems. In the fifth session, the members made their own personal shield. They drew pictures depicting both happy and unhappy times with their families, pictures depicting their understanding of why their parents got divorced, and pictures of something they wished for their family in the future.

In the sixth session, we listened to a taped story of a mother and her daughter discussing the parent's divorce. Discussion afterwards highlighted that one of the problems created by divorce is when parents complain about each other to the child - the child then feels torn and pulled in different directions. We practiced being able to tell others when we are feeling uncomfortable about something in the family. In the seventh session, the group discussed the positive outcomes of divorce and each child made a colourful collage depicting "Good things about divorce". The children initiated discussion about whether marriage was futile as it could end in divorce - however most of the group saw marriage as a worthwhile goal. The last session included feedback - members telling each other what they appreciated about each other in the group, an evaluation of the group experience, a summing up and a concluding party.

The group members seemed to develop a sense of commonality and trust with each other. This helped them not to feel alone in their feelings, and one could see their "growth" from week to week. It was most gratifying for me to lead this group and to witness their development.

Yours sincerely,

SHERYL SMITH (Social Worker).