

Benefits of Group Therapy During Family Divorce

A Qualitative Study with Middle School Students

Anay Castro, Christina Urban & Kelly Morris
 Dr. Pompeo-Fargnoli
 Monmouth University

BACKGROUND

- Research shows that in 2020, 2.3 per 1,000 of the population in the United States couples became divorced (CDC, 2022). During divorce, the affected couple will experience a wide range of emotions, as well as potential lifestyle changes and daily routines.
- Divorce does not only affect the couple, but it also affects the other family members. The current study is needed because adjusting to a new family structure, lifestyle and routine during a developmental period may have long standing effects on adolescents without proper treatment and resources.
- This study will invite 4-6 middle school students to attend group counseling sessions throughout the school year. The students will learn positive coping skills, communication skills, and be able to share their experiences with peers.
- This study will follow the progress of the members and examine the benefits of group therapy for fifth and sixth grade students whose families have separated or divorced.

PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to identify the potential benefits of group therapy for middle school students experiencing parental divorce.

This study will address the following questions:

- How do school counselors identify students experiencing a family divorce or parental separation?
- How does parental divorce affect middle school students academically, socially and emotionally?
- How can students struggling with parental divorce in their family benefit from group therapy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Previous research has shown that children at a young age may experience behavioral problems because of their parents being divorced such as anger and conduct disorders; emotional concerns such as depression, grief, and self-blame; and academic concerns such as inability to focus and follow directions (Amato & Cheadle, 2008).
- The effects of divorce on children can have an impact on their everyday life. This includes affecting the child's emotional and social well-being as well as relationship development (Beverly, Molloy, Hart, Ginsberg & Mulvey, 2007).
- Research has shown that not only does divorce affect children socially and emotionally, but academic achievement has declined in children who are experiencing divorce in their family (Beverly, Molloy, Hart, Ginsberg & Mulvey, 2007).

PROPOSED METHOD

Proposed Procedures

- The goal of this psychoeducational group is to identify the benefits of group counseling and promote social-emotional learning through shared experiences and resourceful activities.
- The participants will be selected through purposeful sampling.
- The group will have 4-6 students in grades 5 and 6 participate. It will be a closed group for confidentiality purposes.
- Because of the focused topic, members can be in a co-ed setting.
- Students will also learn how to effectively process and cope through identifying the concerns and feelings of students and provide resources to assist them emotionally, socially and academically.
- Qualitative research method will be used, through facilitating group therapy with the students to identify how they are feeling with their parent's divorce and the benefits of group counseling.

IMPLICATIONS

- This study has the potential to influence additional group therapeutic interventions, educating teachers, faculty, administration and school counselors on the benefits of group therapy with students going through a family divorce. Additionally, this study could influence more group therapeutic interventions at neighboring districts.
- It is hopeful that the data collected can be useful in shedding light on the well-being of adolescents during a transitional time, how to identify at risk-youth and the effective interventions and techniques school counselors can use to assist.
- The potential findings from this study have the potential to educate students and family members how to grow and develop in a positive way, develop positive coping skills and encourage healthy social-emotional development.
- This study has the potential to promote social-emotional learning with members, through shared experiences and teach effective coping skills while experiencing parental divorce.
- The findings from this research has the potential to assist redefining family and family roles with students and assist students with continuing to maintain healthy relationships with both parents.
- It is possible that a group therapeutic setting can encourage more diverse relationships among students.

LIMITATIONS

- It is challenging for the research team to collect data throughout the year, as the group will not meet during winter, spring and summer breaks.
- It is difficult for the research team to generalize their findings as not every student will experience the same or similar situations.
- This study is not considering other qualifying students who were not able to participate in this group.
- It is challenging for the research team to observe long-term benefits of group therapy, as group members continue their education and advance past middle school.
- There is potential risk that participating group members can no longer be a part of the group due to family relocation and/or custody.
- Due to the demographic makeup of this school, the findings may vary if this group is placed in a different district.

REFERENCES

- Amato, Paul & Cheadle, Jacob. (2008). Parental Divorce, Marital Conflict and Children's Behavior Problems: A Comparison of Adopted and Biological Children. *Social Forces - SOC FORCES*. 86. 10.1353/sof.0.0025.
- Beverly, W. R., Molloy, P., Hart, B., Ginsberg, S., & Mulvey, T. (2007). Conducting a children's divorce group: One approach. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 20(3), 163-75.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, March 25). *FASTSTATS - marriage and divorce*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved June 24, 2022, from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/marriage-divorce.htm>



For questions/comments, email:
s1317721@monmouth.edu
s0590863@monmouth.edu
s1332703@monmouth.edu