

New Beginnings Overview Handout

A second-tier intensive 16-hour parent skills training for parents in moderate to high conflict pre- or post-divorce

Session One - Making the Commitment to Caring (Child-Focused or Out of Focus). Parents learn to recognize parental hostility and discover how conflict impacts their child's development. Factors which influence a child's adjustment to divorce are presented. The notion of "child-focused" versus "self-focused" is proposed and stressed throughout the program. Parents complete a "Commitment to Caring" agreement and are introduced to the eight steps of effective co-parenting.

Session Two - Allowing My Child to Love Both Parents (Plan for Peace or Tug of War). For the sake of their child, parents learn to view their former spouse from their child's perspective. Parents work to identify the positive and valuable qualities of the child's other parent. They learn to create two homes, minimize stress at transitions, and make time sharing a positive experience for their child. Parents determine the obvious and not so obvious ways they put their child in the middle of their conflict. They discover the influence of loyalty and the ways their children struggle to avoid a loyalty bind. The importance of allowing children access to their extended family is also addressed.

Session Three - Changing My Long Term Role (Letting Go or Holding On). Parents examine their attachment to their former spouse. They discover that their anger and bitterness keep them emotionally attached to one another in much the same way as their love once did. They identify their level of attachment and learn ways to let go physically and emotionally from their marital relationship. The grief process, forgiveness and the value of rituals are reviewed.

Session Four - Choosing My Personal Path (Make it Better or Keep it Bitter). Parents clarify their personal choices and identify a personal path. The term "realignment" is introduced to assist parents in creating a new role as co-parents. Obstacles to realignment are examined and the notion of "secondary gains," "boundaries" and the "non-interference principle" are presented. Characteristics of a business relationship are taught as they apply to a co-parenting relationship. The STP-A technique is demonstrated. Parents realize that they are separate but equal partners in their role as co-parents regardless of their custody arrangement.

Session Five - Managing My Own Anger (Neither Fight nor Take Flight). Parents explore the emotion of anger. They determine what anger is, the internal and external signals of anger, constructive versus destructive anger, anger triggers, and the consequences of harboring anger. Parents recognize their distorted beliefs and how their negative assumptions create negative feelings toward the other parent. The Anger Connection (cognitive restructuring) is presented to teach parents how their thoughts create their feelings. Parents are taught to take responsibility for their actions rather than wait for their co-parent to change. In addition, they are exposed to a variety of strategies to manage their anger as well as their child's anger.

Session Six - Taking Control of Conflict (Defuse or Light the Fuse). Parents examine the cycle of conflict using concepts of "fire prevention." Barriers to effective conflict resolution are highlighted and techniques to overcome these barriers are practiced. They identify ways to defuse conflict for themselves and their child. Parents learn effective communication and listening skills. The advantages of effective communication between co-parents are stressed.

Parents identify their contribution to the communication pattern and identify obstacles to successful interaction. Tips for dealing with unreasonable expectations and limit-setting techniques are taught and practiced. *For parents who have been battered by their ex-spouse, or who have been a batterer, this session will also contain strategies for maintaining separate lines of communication in order to serve the needs of the child(ren) to have both parents involved in their lives and avoid any dangerous situations.*

Session Seven - Negotiating Agreement (All a Winner or Winner Take All).

Problem-solving techniques and business relationship skills are examined from a divorced parent position. A seven step negotiation method is demonstrated. Parents discover that negotiating on behalf of their child means that if their child "wins" then everyone is the "winner." Parents learn how to prepare for and organize business meetings with their co-parent. They develop constructive ways to address many typical divorce situations.

****Session Eight - Co-Parenting is Forever (Cooperation or Conflict).**

To formalize their joint commitment to their child's future, co-parents participate in an optional Mediation of a real legal issue, OR a negotiation on an issue of concern in a session *face-to-face***.

This is essentially a therapeutic mediation with two mental health professionals assisting a State Supreme Court Certified Mediator to settlement of a key issue for the coparents. The attorneys, should the coparents wish, may also attend this session and participate on a limited basis. Should they reach a settlement, the agreement will be recorded by the mediator and presented to the Court as with all mediation agreements.

If the coparents have no pressing legal issues to mediate, the final session will be a negotiation of issues of concern between the coparents: issues that previously have served as barriers to open and honest communications between them.

The cost of the course is on a sliding scale. (The litigant must declare their income in order to discover what their fee will be.

Each class is two hours in length and takes place at our offices from 6-8pm on assigned nights for 8 weeks. Enrollees should understand that only one partner takes the course each section, so they should work out which night between them prior to registration.

**COUNSELING ASSOCIATES
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Located in the office subdivision called CROWN POINTE at 16th Avenue and 40th Terrace.