

## 2020 Divorce and Co-Parenting Education Focus Group Meeting

Thursday, November 12, 2020 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. CST

### Minutes

1. Focus Group Chair Lawrence G. Shelton welcomed those in attendance and invited volunteers to take notes. Anthony Ferraro and Judy Myers-Walls volunteered.

2. Those in attendance briefly introduced themselves. A list is appended to these minutes.

3. Mindy Markham and Anthony Ferraro provided an update on the Divorce Evaluation Assessment Collaborative [DEAC] based at Kansas State University. Their project to implement a universal program evaluation for Divorce and Co-Parenting programs has accomplished the following steps:

- Finalized the pre-test, post-test, and knowledge constructs based on feedback from focus group and advisory group
- Developed website (<https://www.hhs.k-state.edu/ahs/outreach/deac/index.html>)
- Created intake survey for entities interested in using the evaluation tool
- Have 3 programs currently using the evaluation tool:
- Parents Forever (University of Minnesota)
- Successful Co-Parenting After Divorce (Florida State University)
- CARE (OnlineParentingPrograms.com)
- Developed a follow-up survey that Parents Forever is currently using for a 6 month follow-up
- Developed a data sharing agreement that is currently being reviewed by our Office of General Counsel
- Forthcoming brief report in *Family Relations* about the process of developing the evaluation tool

4. Program updates.

- The Minnesota Parents Forever program is collecting evaluation data using the adapted DEAC instrument (n > 500 so far)
- Judy Myers-Walls reported that the CARE program from OnlineParentingPrograms.com now has a function allowing users to choose one of three versions of the class: divorcing/separating parents; cohabiting parents; and never-married/never lived together parents. The class will reflect wording and content relevant to that audience. Ellen Taner asked about the reading level of the CARE program; Judy responded that it was 4th-5th grade.
- Larry reported there is a new Oklahoma statute requiring divorce education (see recent *NCFR Update* for link)

5. New publications.

Larry highlighted David Schramm and Emily Becher's piece on Common Practices for Divorce Education in the July 2020 issue of *Family Relations* and the Decade in Review article on Divorce, Re-partnering and Stepfamilies by Kelly Raley and Megan Sweeney in the February 2020 issue of *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

6. How have programs been affected by the pandemic? How have they adapted, and how is it working?

- Judy mentioned that the programming that she does is all on online, and some of that dropped off at first when courts closed and therefore stopped referrals and mandates. But then things picked up when things partially reopened and programs that had been entirely face-to-face wanted to learn more about online options.
- Larry Shelton reporting that the Vermont program went online due to the pandemic
- Judy reported an increase in consulting work on the benefits of online divorce education.
- Tonya reported that in Kansas, Alternative Dispute Resolution changes that were supposed to be implemented in 2020 were derailed by the pandemic. She also reported a lack of professionals trained in ADR to help get the surplus of cases through.

A discussion of the pros and cons of online programming followed.

- One suggestion was to work collaboratively to create a synchronous wrap-around service for families after they finish required classes.
- Provides greater coverage to remote areas without approved programs (Judy)
- Better ability to control circumstances/quality control/
- Creating communities; ways to engage the participants beyond the course to build support network (Luke)
  - Doesn't see an online pathway to this, but could see follow up webinars as a pseudo booster (Ellen)
  - Asynchronous v. synchronous settings? (Larry)
    - Live sessions via Zoom in response to COVID-19 with Maine programs (Dan)
    - Is there a way to do a hybrid where you have asynchronous work with a zoom/forum supplement (thinking about online teaching type model) (Ray)
    - Modularized content that could build community engagement over long periods of time (Mindy)
    - Concerns over sustainability and cost of a hybrid or modularized model (Emily)
  - It is something CARE has been thinking about (Judy)

7. Many of us have had years of experience providing education for parents separating and co-parenting. Question: If your position description and funding permitted, what do you wish you could do that would be helpful to parents and children?

- A life span, community wide effort to provide education in the skills needed for healthy relationships, mental health support and intervention at times of transition or distress, and supportive therapeutic follow-up for everyone affected by family disruption. (Larry)
- Integration of healthy divorce into mainstream media (Ellen)
- K-12 & young adult health relationships (Emily)
- ADR not seen as a primary pathway amongst attorneys in KS (Tonya)
- Thinking about IPV in divorce education (Judy)
- Caring Dads [Toronto] as a potential new program (Dan)

8. One suggestion made at last year's meeting was to discuss Relationship, Co-Parenting and Divorce Education in High School. Are any of us involved in such programs? Would we like to be?

- Ellen reported being in preliminary stages with a new HS program "Good talk for children."

9. Judy had requested some discussion about whether anyone was addressing IPV and/or reconciliation in their classes. There was only limited time to discuss this, but Judy said she needed to go ahead and add a page to their program on considering reconciliation and couple relationship skills.

- For IPV, the Caring Dads program in Toronto was mentioned.

10. David Schramm regrets he cannot join us for the meeting, but submitted these inquiries:

I wanted to ask a question to the group – what programming are states currently doing that involves any type of education for children or teens, whose parents have separated/divorced? Is it mandated in any state? If folks are offering it, in what format? Asynchronous or synchronous online programs? Face-to-face? Is there a curriculum they are already using? There's a group in Utah exploring options but they don't know what is out there already. They have a face-to-face class for 9-12 year-olds that doesn't get much attention. And when it does, it's often after the parents have been divorced for several months to years after, when they start having struggles.

Also, does anyone know of an app that has divorce ed/coparenting helps, resources, videos, courses?

11. Suggestions for work we can do this year. Larry will follow up on this.

12. Suggestions for topics for next year's meeting

- A suggestion: Could we invite some court personnel to join us at a future meeting?

13. Adjournment was precipitated by the expiration of our scheduled time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Anthony J. Ferraro, Judy Myers-Walls & Lawrence G. Shelton

An audio recording of the meeting was made. E-mail [ishelton@uvm.edu](mailto:ishelton@uvm.edu) to request.

In attendance:

Emily Becher  
Jonathan Beckmeyer  
Anthony Ferraro  
Laura Armstrong Fuchs  
SE Gutierrez  
Erin Guyette  
Mindy Markham  
Judy Myers-Walls  
Ray Petren  
Dan Puhlman  
Paige Rainforth  
Tonya Ricklef  
Luke Russell  
Lawrence Shelton  
Ellen Taner  
Jessica Veitch  
McKenzie Zimmermann