

**'PARENTING AFTER SEPARATION'
TRAINING FOR FDR PROFESSIONALS – RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA (2006)**

Understanding the Clientele

Explores adult and child experience in separating families with a psycho-educative focus on models of parenting, implications of these parenting styles for children, review of the developmental needs of children, children's age-related coping styles, principles underlying constructive shared parenting involvement and an overview (using research findings) of the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse in this population, dynamics of abusive relationships and implications for presentation and assessment in this programme.

Engaging with this Client Group

This is a challenging client group and being cognisant with relationship dynamics and the likely experience of programme attendees is important to informing interventions at the individual, couple and group level.

My workshops assist the participants to:

- make realistic appraisal of what is possible to achieve through specific client interventions;
- identify factors that determine workability with this client group;
- have an informed perspective that enables more accurate in-situ assessment;
- develop a capacity for identifying and engaging with violent and controlling men/ resistant, controlling women;
- increase responsiveness to damaged, traumatised presentation.

Skill Development in Working with this Clientele

Through theoretical input, case discussion and role play explore the dynamics of working with involuntary clients, model strategies for engaging and dealing with strong emotions, defensives reactions and resistance to change.

Previous workshop participants in their feedback have commented that they feel safe, yet challenged in the groups that I facilitate. One of my particular strengths is that I am able to attend to the learning needs of each of the participants, from the experienced to relative 'newcomers' to the field. Careful attention is paid to workshop participants' current level of work experience, in the context of meeting the organisational requirements for the programme and the challenging dynamics of working with this client group.

Impact on Workers

This session addresses the impact on staff of working with the challenges of this programme and will:

- through increased knowledge and experiential practice build confidence in their ability to work with this client group;
- discuss the impact of non-uptake of the service and limited feedback;
- explore self-care strategies;
- provide relevant feedback for management.

Outcomes

The training draws on current research findings and uses case discussion and role plays to demonstrate characteristic scenarios. The experiential and interactive style assists to:

- Enhance understanding of the experience of parents and children in separation
- Maintain a neutral process focus while communicating empathy
- Model co-operative respectful interaction
- Model strategies for managing angry or hostile/ abusive behaviour
- Explore triggers and defensive responses in self
- Learn strategies for avoiding escalation of tensions
- Develop self-care strategies at personal, peer and organisational levels.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

In facilitating these workshops I draw on 25 years experience working with a family law clientele, including 14 years as a counsellor in the Brisbane Registry of the Family Court. This has provided me with extensive experience in working with mandated clients in court ordered counselling and mediation, being part of initiatives and running of group programs looking to develop effective interventions with couples experiencing intractable or enduring conflict, making assessments and providing family reports to the Court. My special interests and researches have been in the area of childhood trauma and its long-term impact. I have presented papers at international and national forums on topics such as children's attachment needs, therapeutic interventions with couples in conflict, managing domestic violence and child abuse in the legal context. I am an accredited workplace trainer.

I conduct training in related areas including:

- "Working with Difficult Clients" (*Centrelink Social Workers, Court Support Workers*)
- "Child Inclusive Practice" (*R A (Brisbane), Family Law Practitioners*)
- "Children at Risk: what we don't understand" (*Child protection workers, AASW*)
- "Dynamics of Abuse: impact on child and adult functioning" (*Several workshops*)
- "Managing Vicarious Traumatization and Debriefing" (*Solicitors, Children & Young People's Commission, Brisbane, Court Support Workers*)

The training comprises four half-day modules and can be taken as a two day workshop, two one day workshops or sequentially over four half days. Twelve – fourteen participants would be recommended for this level of interactive workshop.

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