

Session 1 Outline

Understanding Divorce and Separation

Introduce self, group, and rules for the group—Group Rules sign

Icebreaker activity

What is the role of a family?

- + Physical protection
- + Emotional support
- + Creates healthy and happy feelings

What do divorce and separation mean?

- + Personal definitions—Handout 1.1
- + Discuss answers and clarify
- + What divorce means and does not mean

Divorce terminology

- + Mediation
- + Visitation
- + Child support

Clarifying misconceptions about divorce and separation—Handout 1.2

- + Parents didn't try to stay married
- + Parents will get back together
- + Others will treat the teen differently
- + The divorce/separation was the teen's fault

Normalizing the divorce and separation experience

- + Statistics on divorce in the U.S.—Handout 1.3

Reasons parents get divorced or separated

- + Fighting/conflict
- + Money
- + No longer in love
- + Not enough time together
- + Jail/prison
- + Infidelity
- + Not solely one parent's fault for the divorce/separation

Deep breathing relaxation technique—Topic Card 1

- + Teach basic steps
- + Practice deep breathing
- + Deep Breathing Take Home Worksheet—Handout 1.4

Session wrap-up

Handouts

- 1.1 Defining Divorce and Separation**
- 1.2 Truth about Divorce Activity**
- 1.3 Common Divorce and Separation Experiences**
- 1.4 Deep Breathing Take Home Worksheet**

Session 1: Understanding Divorce and Separation

Session Goals:

- + **Introductions to the group**
- + **Help teens to understand:**
 - * What is the role of a family?
 - * What do divorce and separation mean?
 - * Divorce terminology
 - * Reasons parents get divorced/separated
- + **Clarify confusing aspects and misconceptions of divorce**
- + **Normalize the divorce/separation experience**
- + **Develop skills in the deep breathing relaxation technique**

Materials:

- Poster board/dry erase board
- Markers
- Writing utensils
- Handouts 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4
- Group Rules Sign, Topic Card 1
- Parent Handout
- Teen First Questionnaire (Appendix D)

Introduction

Note: Start the session by introducing yourself. Then discuss why the teens are here, rules for the group, and an overview of the program. Adjust the following statements based on how often the group will be meeting and let the teens know what days and times you will be meeting.



“Hello everyone, my name is _____. Let’s talk about why we are all here. As some of you might know, a lot of teens your age have parents who are going through a divorce or separation or have already gotten a divorce. You are here today so we can talk about what divorce or separation means for you and your family and what you can do to help yourself during this transition. We are going to meet as a group several times to talk about divorce and separation. Today, we are going to talk about what divorce and separation mean, go over some terms, discuss the effects the situation might have on you and your family, answer some questions you have about divorce and separation, and practice a relaxation skill.”

Group Rules sign

Note: Pick one teen to write the rules for the group on a piece of poster board or dry erase board and place rules in the room where the teens can see them as a visual reminder when completed. Suggested rules for the group are shown at right, but other group rules may also be established.



“Since we all know why we’re here and what we’ll be doing, let’s go over some rules for the group. _____ (volunteer) will write down the rules so everyone can remember them. The first rule is to be respectful to everyone in the group. You shouldn’t say things to purposely hurt anyone’s feelings. The second rule is to listen when other people are talking. Listening to others is respectful and is necessary so that we can hear what they are saying. We are going to be talking to each other about some difficult things in the group, so the third and final rule is not to talk to people outside of the group about what others in the group say. You can talk to other people about what you say in the group, but not what other people say in the group.”

GROUP RULES

1. **Be respectful to everyone in the group.**
2. **Listen when other people are talking.**
3. **Do not talk to people outside of the group about what other people in the group say.**

134

From *Teen First Divorce Treatment Program*, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707)

“Can someone tell me why each of these rules is important?”

Note: After the teens answer the above discussion question, administer the **Teen First Questionnaire** to get a pretest score for each group member to determine their level of adaptive attitudes towards their parents’ divorce or separation before program implementation.

Icebreaker activity

Note: Have the teens take turns saying their names and one thing they like to do for fun as an icebreaker activity.



“Let’s go around the room and tell everyone your name and a few fun things you like to do so we can all get to know one another a little better. I will start. Again, my name is _____ and I like to _____.”

What is the role of a family?



“Family can mean different things to different people. As you know, family can be the people you have lived with and people who are related to you, or could even just be people who are close to you whom you spend a lot of time with.”



“What is the role of a family? What do they provide?”

Note: Go around the group and have the teens share what they think the role of a family is to them. Have the group elaborate on the different things that families can provide.



“There are many different roles that families can fulfill. For example, most of the time, families help to take care of you physically by providing you with a place to live, food to eat, and clothes to wear. Also, they can provide you with the emotional support that you need in different situations. When you are upset or happy, families are there to help listen to you and offer advice to get you through tough times or to celebrate good times with you. Families also bring people a lot of joy. Family members can enjoy spending quality time with each other and do different activities that make them happy.”

What do divorce and separation mean?

Handout 1.1

Defining Divorce and Separation **Handout 1.1**

Please write down your own definition of divorce and separation.

From Teen First Divorce Treatment Program, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707) 137

Note: Pass out **Handout 1.1** to the group and have them write about what divorce and separation mean to them.



“Divorce and separation can mean different things to different people. Let’s take a few minutes for you to write down what these terms mean to you.”

Please write down your own definition of divorce and separation.

Note: Have each teen share what they wrote. If the group understands the concepts but are having trouble writing, have them verbally explain what they think by pretending they are explaining these terms to younger children.



“Those are all good definitions of divorce and separation. To put it simply, divorce is when your parents are not married anymore and they are no longer living together. Separation is when your parents are either still married or were never married, but they are not together anymore at the current time. Parents who are separated but still married may get back together, but parents who are separated and were never married will probably not get back together. Some teens think that one of their parents is just going to leave and they will no longer have any contact with them. Divorce and separation does not always mean that you will never see one parent again. Things are going to change, but your parents will still be your parents. Your parents’ divorce or separation will not change how they feel about you.”

Divorce terminology

Note: Briefly go over some terminology that teens may have heard during the divorce process.



“There are some different terms or words that you may hear during this process, such as *mediation*, *visitation*, and *child support*.”



“If anyone has heard these terms before, can you share with the group what you think they mean?”

Note: Have some group members share their definitions of these terms and then discuss the terminology as a group.



“*Mediation* often means that your parents will use an objective or neutral person, maybe a lawyer or court member, to help settle any arguments they have about divorce. Mediation helps them settle things like how they will split up different property. *Visitation* or *visitation rights* means that the parent who does not have custody of you or who does not get to see you as often has the right to come visit you and spend a certain amount of time with you. How often and when the visitation will happen will be decided by the court. Finally, *child support* is when you live with one parent most of the time, but the other parent pays money to help support you and your siblings.”

Note: Discuss any confusion or additional questions the teens may have about this topic. If a teen has a question that you are not able to answer, have them try to get the answer from their parent.

Clarifying misconceptions about divorce and separation



“Sometimes teens think that certain things are going to happen after their parents’ divorce or separation that may not be true. These are called misconceptions because they are things that lots of people think are true but they are not.”

Note: The last section of this session will cover five common misconceptions about divorce and separation. Conduct the **Truth About Divorce Activity** by reading the following statements as a group and having each of the teens explain if they agree or disagree with the statements.



“Now we are going to do an activity that addresses some of these misconceptions. It’s called the Truth About Divorce Activity. I will read the group some statements and you will all take turns sharing if you agree or disagree with the statements and why you think that way. We will then discuss which one is the more truthful answer.”

Truth about Divorce Activity (Handout 1.2)

Truth about Divorce Activity **Handout 1.2**

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? All of the usually truer answers are circled.

1. A **D** **You will never see the parent you do not live with.**
Just because you do not live with a parent does not mean you will never see them—you will just see them less. Your parents will talk and decide when you will be able to see the parent you do not live with most of the time.
2. **A** D **It is not your fault your parents got divorced.**
Parents usually get divorced for many different reasons, but you are not one of the reasons. There is nothing you did that caused the divorce or separation. There is nothing you could have done to stop the divorce.
3. A **D** **I will always feel sad or mad about the divorce.**
You might feel sad or mad after the divorce, but these strong feelings will go away. Most teens feel a lot less sad or mad one year or less after the divorce happened.
4. A **D** **My parents did not try to stay married.**
Most parents tried very hard to stay married, but it was too hard for them and they thought divorce was the best for your family. Just because your parents divorced or separated does not mean they did not try to stay married.
5. **A** D **There are a lot of teens in your class with divorced or separated parents.**
There are probably many other teens in your grade at your school whose parents are separated or divorced. If you go around and ask three peers if their parents are divorced, at least one of them will probably say their parents are divorced or separated.

138 From *Teen First Divorce Treatment Program*, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707)



“What are some other misconceptions about divorce or separation that you have thought yourself or heard others talk about?”

Note: Have each group member answer the discussion question, and have them discuss why the misconception is not true. Next pass out **Handout 1.2** and have the group take the handout home with them.

Normalizing the divorce and separation experience

Note: This section will involve many group discussion questions to reinforce the idea to the teens that they are not the only ones who are in a divorce or separation situation or who feel a certain way about the divorce. Sharing statistics and personal stories and feelings will help the teens to normalize the divorce process.



“Not everyone’s parents are divorced or separated, but there are many teens like you who do have parents who are divorced or separated. You are not the only one who has to go through all of these different changes. Many of you may be surprised by how many teens your age have parents who are divorced and how that number will get even bigger as you get older.”



“Think of the number of kids in your grade here at your school. What percentage of teens in your grade do you think have parents who are divorced or separated?”

Note: Have everyone in the group take a guess at the percentage of teens in their class who have experienced divorce or separation. Then inform the group of the statistics on adolescents and divorce.



“About 50% of 12- to 17-year-old adolescents have parents who are divorced or separated. The percentage of teens who experience divorce or separation also increases with age.”



“Were any of you surprised by how common divorce and separation are?”

Note: Have each group member answer the discussion question. Pass out **Handout 1.3** to the group and give them a few minutes to interview one another about shared experiences and emotions.



“Now we are going to talk about personal experiences and feelings that you might be having or have had in the past because of the divorce. I want you to split up into pairs or three’s and ask one another about some of the feelings and experiences that they have had throughout their parents’ separation or divorce. You can think of other questions to ask also, if you would like. Then, we will discuss with the group some of the things that you have in common with one another.”

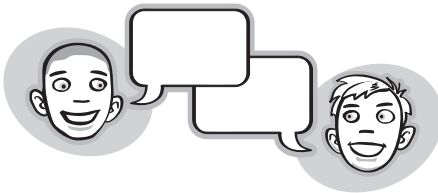
Handout 1.3

Common Divorce and Separation Experiences Handout 1.3

Ask your partner the following questions about their own experiences and feelings regarding their parents' divorce or separation to find out what you have in common.

1. What are some changes that have happened in your life after the divorce or separation?
2. What are some emotions that you felt after you heard about your parents' getting divorced or separated? How do you feel now?

* If your partner feels comfortable, you can also ask him or her other questions that are not on this handout.



From Teen First Divorce Treatment Program, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707)

139

Note: Have each group member share a few things that they had in common with their partner(s).



“Knowing that other teens have been through some of the same experiences and often feel the same way as you in this situation can help you to realize that you are not alone. You can go to other people for support, and they will be able to relate to some of the things you are experiencing and feeling.”

Reasons parents get divorced or separated



“Either from stories you have heard or things you have seen in the media, it is clear that there are a lot of different reasons parents may get divorced or separated. The reasons your parents divorced or separated can be difficult for others to understand because they might be different from reasons someone else’s parents had.”

Note: Acknowledge that some teens in the group may not know or have a reason for why their parents are or will become divorced. Let them know that it is okay to ask their parents for a reason. Make it clear to the group that these reasons apply to separated parents as well. Next, on a dry erase board or a piece of poster board, write down the different reasons that the group comes up with about parental divorce or separation.



“As a group, let’s see how many different reasons we can come up with of why parents get divorced or separated. These can be reasons your parents got a divorce or just reasons you have heard of before. Raise your hands when you have an idea, and I will write the ideas down for everyone to see. Then we will discuss some of the more common reasons.”

Note: Have the teens say where they have heard the reason(s) that they produce. Then discuss more common reasons for parental divorce and separation.



“Some reasons for divorce or separation are more common than others. For example, one reason parents might get divorced is that they have conflict or fight too much when they are around each other. An example of a reason why they fight or argue with one another might be how they want to save or spend money. Another common reason parents might get divorced is they are just not in love anymore. Your parents got married or were together because they were in love, but sometimes people’s feelings change. A third reason parents get divorced is that they do not spend enough time together. Life is really busy sometimes, and when you do not put in the effort to spend time together, people can grow apart. Other common reasons are when a parent goes to jail/prison or when one parent has cheated with someone else. These last two reasons are common but are often difficult to talk about because they can be so harmful to a relationship.”



“Talking about these different reasons can bring up feelings of blame. Who do you think is to blame for your parents’ divorce or separation?”

Note: Take answers from the group and then discuss that usually both parties contributed to the divorce or separation.



“Sometimes it is easy to think that one parent is more at fault than the other one. One parent might even think the other parent is totally to blame for the divorce. But most of the time, both parents share some responsibility for their separation or divorce. Thinking that just one parent is at fault will not make you feel better and can hurt your relationship with that parent. The divorce or separation was usually a decision that they made together and that they thought was best for their family.”

Note: Explain to the group why they will be practicing the deep breathing relaxation technique.



“What we discussed in the group today can bring up some upsetting thoughts and emotions. To help cope with these emotions in a healthy way, we will be learning and practicing the deep breathing relaxation technique.”

Deep breathing relaxation technique

Note: End the session by introducing the deep breathing relaxation technique. This technique will help the teens cope with possible distressing feelings that may have come up during the session. Practicing the technique with the teens will also help you become more skilled in this technique and better assist the group.

Basic Steps for Deep Breathing (Topic Card 1)

1. Think of a word that helps you relax. You will repeat this word to yourself while you do deep breathing. (Examples: mom, dad, love, calm)
2. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.
3. During deep breathing, you should breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
4. Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach. Breathe in and out once. If you are doing the technique correctly, your stomach should rise while inhaling and fall while exhaling, and your chest should move very little.
5. Imagine that there is a balloon in your stomach, filling with air as you breathe in and deflating as you breathe out.

Topic Card 1

Basic Steps for Deep Breathing

1. Relaxing word.
2. Comfortable place.
3. Breathe in through nose, breathe out through mouth.
4. One hand on chest, the other on stomach.
5. Breathe in – stomach rises
6. Breathe out – stomach falls

From Teen First Divorce Treatment Program, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707)

131

Note: Make sure the room is not distracting and use a soft, low, calming voice during the technique when speaking to the group. Remind the group to keep their eyes closed. Have the group practice saying their calming word, then practice thinking about their calming word. Remind them to repeat it to themselves throughout the technique. After telling the group to breathe in, wait approximately three seconds before telling them to exhale. The teens' breathing should be slow and continuous. They should not have to hold their breath at any time. If you notice this happening, you may be pausing too long or the teens may be breathing too fast.

Demonstration



"First, I'm going to show you a way to breathe that helps to relax you. This relaxation technique is called deep breathing or diaphragmatic breathing. I'll be teaching you to breathe with your diaphragm instead of taking lots of shallow breaths like we usually do when we are under stress. Your lungs are like two balloons with muscles at the bottom of them. These muscles are called the diaphragm. They pull the balloon-like lungs all the way down, like an accordion, filling them with air. If you are doing the deep breathing technique correctly, when you breathe in your diaphragm should make your stomach stick out. Go ahead and put your right hand on your stomach (on your belly

button) and your left hand on the center of your chest (demonstrate on yourself). When you inhale, the hand on your stomach should move outward while the hand on your chest should move very little. When you breathe out your stomach should move back in. If your stomach does not move or moves less than your chest, you are taking shallow breaths. Breathe deeply by letting your stomach stick out with every breath you take in while keeping your chest fairly still.”

(Check breathing, and if needed, help the students.)

“If you are having trouble, try concentrating on your stomach as you inhale. Try to make it stick out.”

Note: In all relaxation inductions, a person’s voice should be low, soft, warm, melodic, and somewhat hypnotic: The pace should be much slower than conversational speech.

Deep breathing



“Now we will practice deep breathing. In order to do this exercise, you need to be in a relaxed and comfortable position. You can be lying on a couch or bed, or you can sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting on your legs. Close your eyes and clear your mind. Remember as we take a deep breath in and out, your stomach will rise up and down with each breath and your chest will move very little. Now I am going to begin what is called a ten count. When I say ‘in,’ you will breathe in through your nose. And then when I say a number beginning with ten you will breathe out, exhaling through your mouth. Let’s begin. In (breathe in) ...10 (breathe out), in...9, in...8, in...7, in...6, in...5, in...4, in...3, in...2, in...1. Now continue to breathe on your own...breathing in...and out. Listen to my voice as you continue breathing. As you breathe in, imagine that your lungs are filled with cool, clean air. With every breath out, you are breathing out all of the stress and all of the tension in your body. Continue to breathe in... and out. And as you are breathing, notice that your feet and your legs are beginning to feel warm and heavy. Continue breathing in and out. Relaxation is filling your body. And now you realize a feeling of warmth and heaviness starting at your finger tips and climbing up through your arms. You feel very comfortable, very calm, and very relaxed. Continue breathing in...and out. Let the relaxation flow into your lungs, through your body, and let the stress drain out and away from you. And now your entire body is feeling very comfortable, warm, and relaxed. Continue breathing in... and out. Let’s take two more deep breaths. In... and out, one more, in... and out. And now open your eyes. This is the end of deep breathing.”



“How do you feel after doing deep breathing?”

Note: Have each group member compare and contrast how they felt before and after the deep breathing technique. Then pass out the **Deep Breathing Take Home Worksheet**. Instruct the teens to bring back the worksheet to the following session.

Handout 1.4

Deep Breathing Take Home Worksheet Handout 1.4

1. Think of your word that helps you relax.
2. Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down.
3. During deep breathing, you should breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
4. Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your stomach. Breathe in and out once. If you are doing the technique correctly, your stomach should rise while inhaling and fall while exhaling, and your chest should move very little.
5. Imagine that there is a balloon in your stomach, filling with air as you breathe in and deflating as you breathe out.

Keep track of how many times you use deep breathing each day in the chart below. You can write the actual numbers or use tally marks to keep track.

Day of the week	# of times used deep breathing
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

140 From *Teen First Divorce Treatment Program*, © 2015 by Jeremy D. Jewell, Champaign IL: Research Press (www.researchpress.com, 800-519-2707)



“The Deep Breathing Take Home Worksheet

has a shorter version of the instructions for how to do deep breathing. There is also a place for you to keep track of how many times you do deep breathing over the next week. Please try to use deep breathing throughout the next week and keep track of when you do it, then bring the worksheet back with you to the next session so we can discuss it as a group.”

Session wrap-up



“Today we talked about different roles families have and how families can look different.

We learned definitions of divorce and separation and some divorce terminology. We discussed misconceptions, how common divorce and separation are, our shared experiences, and different reasons parents get divorced or separated. We also learned to do deep breathing to help us relax when we are worried, sad, or mad. Try to use deep breathing when you want to relax this week, and you can do it at any time and anywhere and then track when you use it. The next time we see each other we will talk about custody and scheduling issues, transitions, friends, reactions to divorce/separation, and different ways to cope.”

Note: Thank the teens for coming and participating and make sure they know when you will meet next. Have them take the Session 1 handouts and a copy of the parent handout with them to keep.