



Barnardos Conference – Croke Park 2013

Promoting Child-Centred Cooperative Parenting following Separation and Divorce using the Parents Plus Programmes



John Sharry, Michelle Murphy, Adele Keating

www.parentsplus.ie



Parental Separation- Overview of the Literature

- 20% to 25% of children whose parents divorce experience adjustment difficulties compared to 10% of children raised in intact families (Cherlin et al., 1991; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).
- Adjustment problems cannot be attributed to the divorce per se but can in part be accounted for by the experiences of these children within troubled marriages that later end in divorce (Amato, 2000, 2001; Hetherington, 2003; Kelly, 2000, 2003).



Parental Separation - Overview of Literature

- Parental separation, in particular where there is ongoing conflict between parents, can have an adverse effect on children's development (Pryor and Rodgers, 2001). Including:
 - school achievement
 - risk of problem behaviours
 - psychological and social adjustment difficulties
 - difficulties in relationships with parents, siblings and peers (Bacon and McKenzie, 2004).



Protective factors that support children's resiliency include:

- Involvement of the non-residential parent and provision of financial support (Menning, 2002)
- Diminished conflict following divorce (Hetherington, 1999)
- Warm and supportive parenting, adequate monitoring and discipline (Hetherington, 1999)
- Joint custody but high parental conflict negates this effect (Bausermann, 2002).
- Living with the most psychologically competent parent (Emery et al., 1999)



- Ahrons (2007) defines a good divorce as one in which children can comfortably maintain relationships with both parents and their extended kin networks.



Parents Plus Parenting when Separated Programme



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Parents Plus Charity - Origins

- Parents Plus Programmes developed at the request by parents for Irish parenting materials and for Irish families to be involved in making them.
- Developed in collaboration with Irish professionals in the Mater Child and Adolescent Mental Service
- Parents Plus was founded by Carol Fitzpatrick and John Sharry in 1998 Established as a registered charity under the auspices of the Mater Hospital in 2001
- Aim to develop educational and therapeutic materials for parents and children and to provide training and support for professionals working with families



Parents Plus – Key Values

- Aim to develop evidence based therapeutic programmes
– *integrating practice and research*
- Partnership with parents, children and families in development
– *client voice is crucial*

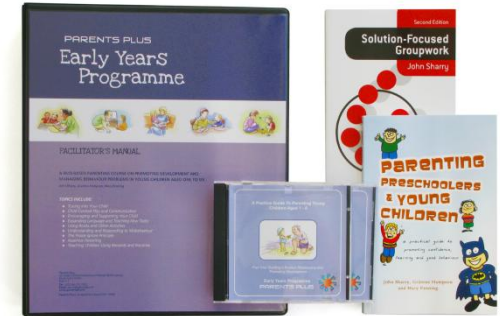




Current Parents Plus Programmes

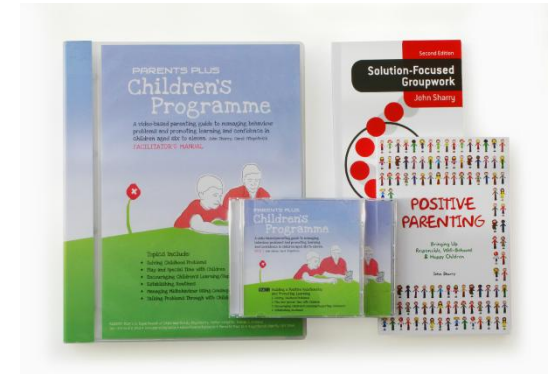
Parents Plus Early Years Programme (1- 6 year olds)

John Sharry, Grainne Hampson, Mary Fanning



Parents Plus Childrens Programme (6-11 year olds)

John Sharry, Carol Fitzpatrick



Parents Plus Adolescents Programme (11 – 16 years olds)

John Sharry, Carol Fitzpatrick

Parenting When Separated Programme

John Sharry, Michelle Murphy, Adele Keating





Parents Plus Programmes Research

Strong evidence base: Fifteen published research studies including seven pragmatic RCT's and several studies independent from developers, all show evidence for effectiveness of Parents Plus Programmes

- Original Programme (Behan et al. 2001, Quinn et al, 2006, 2007)
- Adolescent Programme (Beatie et al, 2007, Nitsch et al, 2011)
- Early Years Programme (Behan et al, 2005;Griffin et al, 2006)
- Children's Programme (Coughlin et al, 2007)

Parents Plus Programmes follow international best practice guidelines and independently evaluated by National Parenting academy in UK



Parents Plus Programmes- Research Evidence

All fifteen studies consistently show that the PPP are effective in

- *reducing behaviour problems in children,
- * reducing parental stress,
- * achieving high parent satisfaction

in a variety of contexts and with a large range of presenting problems and issues.



Parents Plus Programmes



Parents Plus Parenting when Separated Programme



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Phases in the development of PP-PWS

Theory

Literature search-impact of separation on children, protective factors and effectiveness of separated parenting programmes

Modelling

Focus groups were used to identify needs of Irish separated parents. Programme was developed through integration of theory and focus groups.

Exploratory trial

Pilot groups ran in 3 services with 33 parents. Small changes were made to the programme based on feedback.

Definitive RCT

161 parents took part in RCT, treatment were compared to wait list controls pre and post treatment.



Effective Separated Parents Programmes

A review of international separated parents programmes suggest that they (Pollet and Lombreglia, 2008) :

- Increase parents knowledge of the impact of separation on their children
- Help parents to communicate
- Reduce conflict
- Foster a greater willingness for residential parents to encourage their children to spend more time with the non-resident parent
- Increase a desire to settle custody and access battles

These factors led to better outcomes for children post separation (Goodman et al, 2004).

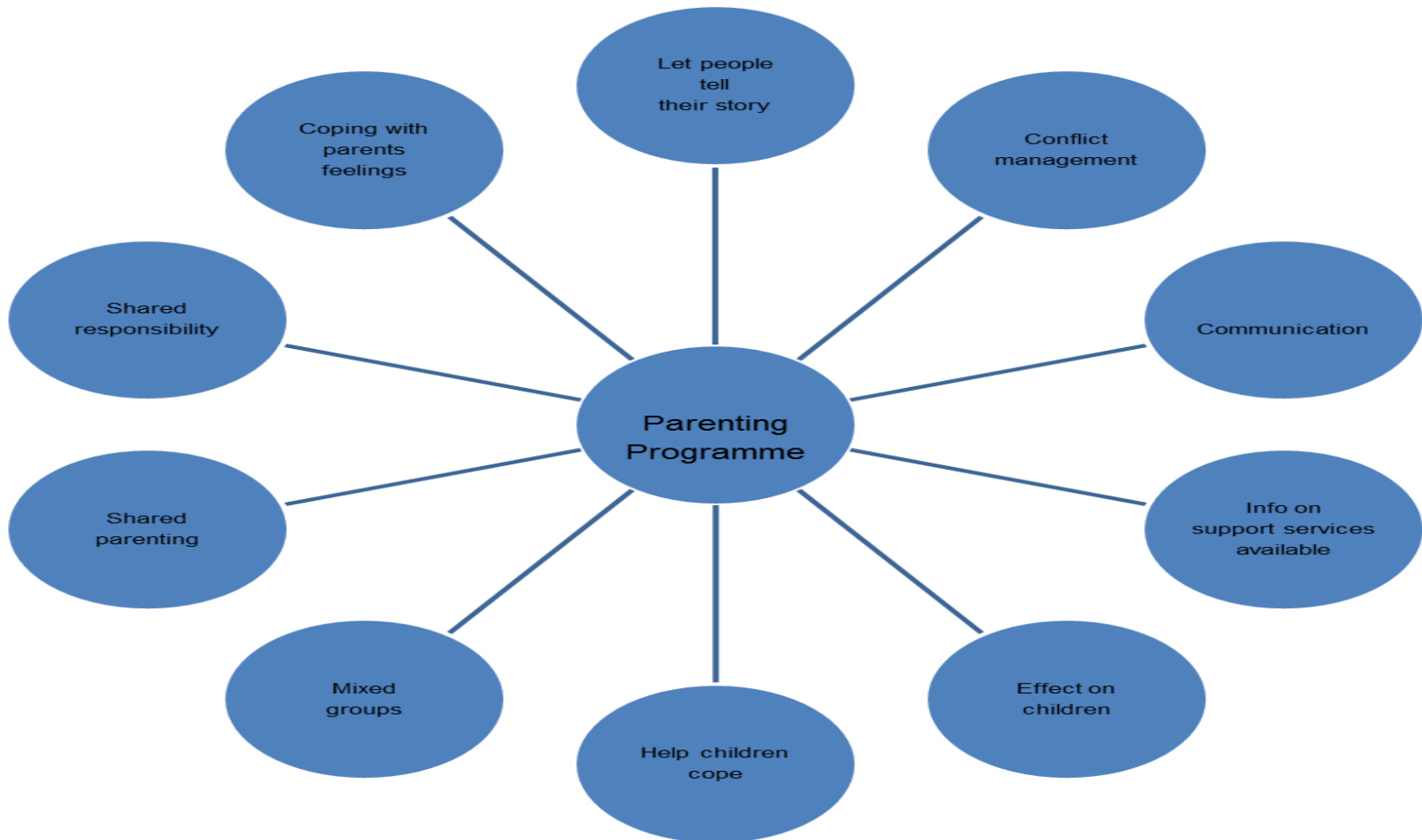


Research suggests separated parents programmes should be:

- Child focused
- Skills based approaches as opposed to information based
- Longer term-include a number of sessions as opposed to a single session
- Use experiential exercises, group discussions and questions and interaction between group participants .
- Promote communication between parents, help parents develop conflict resolution skills and enhance family functioning that promotes children's resiliency.
(Robertson, 2011: Bacon and McKenzie, 2004).



Parents' suggestions from focus groups





Theoretical basis of PP-PWS

Intervention goals

Knowledge of
impact on children

Parenting skills

Parental self care
and support

Conflict
management
skills

Communication
skills

Proximal goals

Improve parent-
child relationship

Decrease parental
stress

Reduce inter-
parental conflict and
increase
communication

Distal goals

Increase child well
being

Improve parental well
being and promote
co-parenting



PP – Parenting when Separated Programme

- Aimed at - Parents preparing for, going through or who have gone through separation/divorce
- Mixed group of resident and non-resident parents
- Generally parent of the same children attend different courses
- 6 Sessions
- Two topics per session with handout and exercises for each
- Screening meeting prior



Parents Plus - Outline of Course

Individual Screening Session

- Explore individual goals and needs

Week 1

- The Impact of Separation on Parents and Children
- Learning to Cope Post Separation

Week 2

- Establishing a cooperative co-parenting relationship
- Communicating with your child's other parent

Week 3

- Helping your child cope
- Communicating with my child about the separation

Week 4

- Being a Residential or a Non-residential Parent
- Managing successful contact and handovers

Week 5

- Personal Coping and Stress Management
- Conflict Management/ Dealing with Challenges

Week 6

- Managing New Relationships
- Parental self care in the long term

Follow up Session

- Review progress/ plan further support



Research Basis to PP-PWS

- Evaluation of the programme as part of Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at UCD
- Sponsored by Parents Plus Charity and HSE Dublin/Mid Leinster
- Pilot: 3 groups were run by the programme developers
- RCT: 25 groups ran in a variety of settings across Ireland and one in the UK, including Mater CAMHS, HSE services, Community Services, Marriage and Relationship Services etc.



Results from the pilot groups

- 33 parents took part
- Results:
- Increase in parenting satisfaction
- Improvement in parent's relationship with their child on the PSQ parent-child relationship scale
- Improvement on all of the client defined goals.



Research design for RCT

- Randomised control trial which employed a complex mixed model design. The main design was a pre-post 2 x 2 mixed model design.
- An independent group design (treatment and control) and a within-subjects group design were used.



Measures

- Mental Health Inventory
- Kansas Parenting Satisfaction
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
- Quality of the Co-Parenting Relationship
- Parenting when Separated Questionnaire
- Goals: for parent, relationship with child and relationship with child's other parent



Randomised Control Trial (RCT)

- 161 separated parents took part
- 71% were mothers and 71% were the resident parent
- 82 were assigned to treatment, of these 56 completed
- 79 were assigned to waiting list control, of these 54 completed



Results from RCT

- **In comparison to controls significant improvements for the treatment group were found in:**
- **Parenting satisfaction on the KPS** pre (m=14.97, sd=3.15) to post (m=15.97, sd=2.58),
F(1,98)=7.73, p=.006
- **Co-parental conflict management on the QCCS** from pre (m=9.27, sd=4.44) to post (m=10.75, sd=4.57), F(1,98)=5.31, p=.02



Results from RCT

- **Co-parental relationship** on the PSQ to (m=28.20, sd=6.83) to post (m=30.95, sd=6.99), $F(1,99)=8.97, p=.003$.



Results from RCT

- **Significant improvements on all Client Defined Goals for treatment group in comparison to control group:**
- **Child goal** pre (m=4.17, sd=1.83) to post (m=7.08, sd=1.66), $F(1,86)=24.70, p<.001$
- **Parent goal** pre (m=3.97, sd=1.76) to post (m=7.47, sd=1.67), $F(1,83)=30.16, P<.001$
- **Co-parenting goal** pre (m=3.10, sd=2.07) to post (m=5.56, sd=2.87), $F(1,81)=16.33, p=.006$



Future Plans

- Support agencies running programme throughout Ireland
- Facilitator Training, supervision and accreditation process
- Work with court service to offer course to families
- Pilot project with circuit and district courts in Dublin



Parents Plus Parenting when Separated Programme



Thanks to partners in development

Parents in focus groups and initial pilot

Mater Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Family Therapy Programme

HSE Longford/Westmeath Psychology Service/ Relationships Ireland

Unmarried and Separated Families Ireland/

One Family / Listowel Family Resource Centre.

Parenting when Separated - Facilitator Training 20th

September 2013 www.parentsplus.ie



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**Parenting when Separated - Facilitator
Training 20th September 2013**

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Parents Plus - Outline of Course

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Parents Plus Quality Protocol

- 1) Collect parents goals pre and post group and keep these central
- 2) Each week facilitators get parents to complete the Parent Group Session Rating form
- 3) Facilitators follow PP basic structure to each group session and focus on facilitation
- 4) Each week facilitators set aside a weekly Facilitator Review / Planning time to review the group session and to plan the next one
- 5) Complete a Facilitator Session Planning and Review sheet for each group session . Each facilitator is encouraged to reflect about their facilitation skills and to complete the Facilitator Quality Checklist
- 6) At the end of the programme parents complete the ‘End of Course’ part of Parent Goal and Review Form and Parent Course Review Form



Accreditation Process

1. Attend Facilitator training for specific PP programme
2. Facilitate at least two parenting groups
3. Quality Protocol, using
 - Session plans and weekly reviews with co-facilitators
 - Parent goal forms and session ratings
 - Course evaluations
4. Video tape of practice
5. Supervision/ consultation sessions (at least 2 half days)
6. Portfolio submission