

**BEHAVIOUR SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND AN INTERVENTION
APPROACH WITH CHILDREN OF DIVORCE IN A SCHOOL
SETTING**

BY

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DECLARATION

I the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and had not previously been submitted at any other university for a degree.

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SUMMARY

BEHAVIOUR SYMPTOMATOLOGY AND AN INTERVENTION APPROACH WITH CHILDREN OF DIVORCE IN A SCHOOL SETTING

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Subject : Psychology of Education
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South African society has been plagued by traumatic events that have influenced many people including children. Within a systemic context children are impacted upon by various micro-systems within which they find themselves, for example, the family, the school and church amongst others, as well as the macro-system of society as a whole. Divorce is such a personal yet extremely traumatic experience especially when there are children involved. Research shows that the effects of divorce are often felt for many years later.

This research study was approached from a qualitative perspective examining the impact of divorce on children in different developmental stages. It highlights ways in which children could be assisted during the crisis of divorce and explores protective factors that would facilitate post-divorce adjustment. The study included short-term therapeutic intervention with six children attending two

schools in the Western Cape. By its very essence this study allows one to offer guidance to schools and parents with regard to emotional support for learners who have been through similar experiences.

OPSOMMING

GEDRAGSIMPTOME EN INTERVENSIE MET KINDERS VAN EGSKEIDINGS IN 'N SKOOL OPSET

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Graad : Magister Educationis in Opvoedkundige Sielkunde
Subject : Opvoedkundige Sielkunde
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Die Suid Afrikaanse samelewing word geteister deur verskillende traumatiese insidente wat 'n invloed het op mense, insluitend kinders. Binne die raamwerk van 'n 'n sistemiese konteks word kinders geskok deur verskeie mikro-sisteme, byvoorbeeld, die familie, die skool, die kerk, sowel as die makro-sisteem van die gemeenskap as a geheel. Egskeiding is a persoonlike, nogtans traumatiese ervaring, veral wanneer daar kinders betrokke is.

Navorsing wys daarop dat die effek van egskeiding op kinders, dikwels langtermyn kan wees. Hierdie studie was van 'n kwaliteit perspektief benader. Die uitwerking op kinders word onder die soeklig geplaas, met spesifieke verwysing na die verskeie ontwikkelings stadia. Hierdie studie fokus ook op hoe kinders deur die krisis ondersteun kan word en verken beskermende faktore wat kinders sal help met hul aanpassing na die egskeiding. Die studie sluit in kort termyn terapeutiese intervensie met ses skoolgaande kinders, in twee skole in

die Wes-kaap. Die aard van die studie laat 'n mens ook toe om voorligting aan skole en ouers te bied met betrekking tot die emosionele ondersteuning van leerders wat die trauma van 'n egskeiding ervaar het.

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

1. BACKGROUND

South African society has been plagued by traumatic events that have influenced many people including children, for example, political riots, accidents, child abuse to mention but a few examples. According to Lewis (1999:1) many children are affected by trauma because of high levels of violence both within the home and within the wider community.

Recent research has focused on how children respond to parental divorce. Lampel (1986:1) contends that symptoms such as anxiety, depression and behavioural problems can have a marked effect on children's academic achievement and social adjustment after the divorce. This can continue for about one year or for as long as five years post divorce. According to Emery (2006) there are many issues to deal with during a divorce process. This does not only include the legal, social and practical issues, but more importantly, the emotional process of divorce.

According to the bio-ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner different social contexts interact and affect human development (Lewis, 2008:2). In other words, there is a reciprocal influence between the individual and the many levels of the surrounding environment. Bronfenbrenner (1995:621) views human development as the interaction of process, person,

context and time factors. It is within this framework that the researcher wishes to contextualize this study. Whilst the focus is ultimately on the child, the child is impacted on within the different microsystems such as the family, the school and the macrosystem which is society at large. In this study, the children are encountered and supported within the school system.

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

Divorce is such a personal yet traumatic experience. The researcher was motivated to conduct this study due to a personal experience of divorce and an acute awareness of how this might impact on the lives of children. The researcher is employed by the Western Cape Education Department and has to deal with learners at both primary and secondary school level. As an employee of the education department, the researcher is responsible for 38 schools falling within the catchment area of the Educational Management and Development Centre (EMDC) within the Central district area. The team at the centre strives to work preventatively, and often receives referrals of children who have experienced some or other emotional trauma as a result of the divorce of their parents or experiences of grief or loss amongst other traumatic experiences.

The school communities that are serviced are diverse in terms of socio-economic status. Hence, with this in mind, the researcher deemed it important to look at an approach to dealing with the trauma of divorce that could be implemented at both primary and high school level. Green (1995:31)

contends that childhood experiences can be far more frightening compared to adults' experience. This he claims, can be attributed to their limited life experience. He also mentions that due to their limited vocabulary they are often unable to give vent to their anxieties. Thus they have a tendency to lock their anxieties inside themselves and therefore the issues remain unresolved (Green, 1995:31).

According to Winter (2000:81) teachers intersperse emotional and interpersonal issues into the daily classroom experience of their learners. This is done through regular class discussions and consideration of various points of view, feelings and opinions of others. It helps learners to be group thinkers and they will eventually start feeling comfortable grappling with difficult issues.

The school psychologist, according to Winter (2000), has been used as an initial and ongoing support and his or her participation is both compassionate and constructive. Their support could involve meeting with the family and the learner depending on the situation. Winter (2000), states that the school's responsibility becomes that of observer, adviser and mainstay or chief support to the child and the family. Schools could also try to anticipate the range of intense emotions that the child or learner may experience in response to their loss.

According to Winter (2000:81), wise or meaningful intervention would include the following:

- Acceptance of range of emotions;
- Increased individual attention;
- Reliable, consistent routines;
- Physical warmth and comforting and
- Gentle, honest dialogue consistently and sensitively reinforced over time.

The above author contends that the primary consideration of the school needs to be the learner's cognitive and emotional development. There should also be awareness that "for the child, it takes courage to recognise and cope with uncomfortable feelings..." (Winter, 2000:82). Developmental benchmarks map out stages of emotional understanding, just as they do cognitive progression. Often, what children say may not mirror what they have internalized and what they have internalized does not remain constant, Winter (2000:82).

Richards and Bates (1997: 441) contend that in order to work with children's reactions to traumatic events effectively one must become familiar with normal signs of stress. They distinguish between different symptoms to stress, which includes physical symptoms, emotional symptoms and cognitive symptoms. Physical symptoms include upset stomach, uncoordination, diarrhoea, dizziness, rapid heartbeat or breathing and sleep disturbances. Behavioural symptoms include school absenteeism, disrespect for others, poor social

skills, substance abuse, and increased risk taking behaviour. Emotional symptoms experienced are the following: fear, anxiety, guilt, sadness, irritability, withdrawal, feelings of helplessness and worry about others. Cognitive symptoms include confusion, distressing dreams, poor attention span, and impairment in concentration, difficulty naming objects, academic difficulties, learning disabilities, lowered IQ and poor communication skills.

According to Richards and Bates (1997), schools are often the first to have contact with children experiencing traumatic situations. This may be manifested in unusual behaviour, which they display. In some cases the school may be the only resource for some children due to the financial cost of professional mental health care services. It is therefore paramount that schools familiarize themselves with the symptoms that children may experience when faced with a traumatic event.

The purpose of an intervention strategy would be to help children resolve and integrate traumatic events in order to prevent the development of chronic or delayed responses. Richards and Bates (1997), suggests forming a school health team consisting of a nurse, counsellor or social worker as well as the teacher and parents as this creates a support system that is able to meet the child's needs. Educating or making the child, parents and teachers aware of the various effects of trauma can be useful in getting help for the child. They also cite various affective, cognitive and behavioural coping strategies that can be used to help children cope.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many research efforts have focused on children's responses to parental divorce. According to Lampel (1986) symptoms of anxiety, depression and behavioural problems have had notable impact on children's academic achievement and social adjustment. Studies have shown that these effects can be felt for six months to one year after the divorce. Emery(2006:3) contends that ideally, parents need to devote a few months prior to their separation, and two to three years after their divorce to deal with the relevant issues, more specifically the emotional aspects of divorce. Longitudinal studies have highlighted that in some cases one-third of children continued to be affected in many areas of their lives, five years after their parent's divorce.

The four research questions, which the researcher hopes to shed light on, are the following:

- 1.2.1 What are the factors on which to focus in therapy, with children who have experienced the divorce of their parents, and what effects do these elements have on children?
- 1.2.2 Are these factors and the impact of the trauma or loss, different for children in different developmental phases of their lives?
- 1.2.3 What preconditions need to exist that would make children feel more equipped to deal with the trauma of divorce?
- 1.2.4 What steps do parents need to take to avoid any long-term negative effects on their children?

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The goals of this study would be as follows:

- 1.3.1 To explore the various issues that children experience when their parents get divorced.
- 1.3.2 To establish whether the impact of the divorce is different for children in various developmental phases of their lives.
- 1.3.3 To highlight ways in which children can be prepared to deal with their parents' divorce.
- 1.3.4 To explore the protective factors that would help children cope more effectively with their parents' divorce.

1.4 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.4.1 Children

The term children in this study refers to, and include children who are of school going age (that is, between the age of 7 and 18 years) in both primary and secondary schools.

1.4.2 Behaviour Symptomatology

The term behaviour symptomatology in this research project refers to a range of symptoms that children may experience which include behavioural, emotional, psychological and physical symptoms.

1.4.3 Intervention approaches

Intervention approaches refer to the different modes of intervening with children who have experienced the trauma of their parents' divorce.

1.4.4 Divorce

Divorce refers to the legal dissolution of a marriage as defined in the government gazette. In other words it refers to the legal termination of a marriage. Whilst the legal definition defines divorce as a single event, the legal dissolution of a marriage in reality involves a long-term series of gains, losses, breakthroughs and setbacks, calm and crisis (Neuman,1998: 4). In other words the effects of the divorce will be felt by children many years later. Thus, for the purposes of this research the term divorce will encompass the broader view of the term as stated.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This research study will be approached from a qualitative perspective. According to Bell (1993:6), a qualitative perspective is more concerned about understanding individuals' perceptions of the world, which seeks insight rather than statistical analysis. In contrast, a Quantitative approach to data collection involves, collecting facts and studying the relationship of one set of facts to another. This approach measures and uses scientific techniques that are likely to yield quantified and possibly generalizable conclusions (Bell, 1993:5).

Merriam (1998:11), Babbie and Mouton (2001:72) as well as Denzin and Lincoln (2000:34) are in agreement that research conducted in the social

sciences and the educational fields are qualitative in nature. Of importance, is that the subjects should be studied in their natural environments, as far as possible. However, there are various meanings as to what actually constitutes qualitative research. According to Shaughnessy and Zeichmeister (1990:5) the scientific method is stressed as the basis of an investigation in the field of psychology. The scientific method is seen as something abstract. It is an approach to knowledge that is best described by distinguishing it from a non – scientific approach to knowledge. A scientific approach is empirical rather than intuitive. It emphasizes direct observation and experimentation as a way of answering questions. Observation is a vehicle for learning a great deal about behaviour by simply observing the actions of others. However, it is important to control or eliminate factors that might influence the events that are observed to prevent the drawing of erroneous conclusions. Scientific observations as cited by Shaughnessy and Zechmeister (1990:9) should be systematic and controlled.

1.6 TARGET POPULATION

The researcher wishes to include six learners in the study who have experienced the trauma of their parents' divorce. This study includes two learners in the early latency phase of development (aged 5-8 years), two learners in the late latency phase of development (aged 9-12 years) and two learners in the adolescent phase of development (aged 13-18 years).

1.7 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Harding (in Le Grange, 2000:194) makes a distinction between method and methodology. Method refers to all the strategies that the researcher uses to gather information. Methodology, on the other hand, refers to the interpretative framework that guides the research process. Babbie and Mouton (2001:74) contend that research design refers to a “plan or a blueprint” that the researcher uses and the kinds of tools and procedures that will be used in implementing the study. What seems to be important is that the researcher work in a specific paradigm and uses the instruments that are most appropriate to data collection. Mouton (2001:56) view the methodology as the processes and action involved in implementing data production.

The researcher will use case studies, as this will facilitate a more in-depth study. According to Bell (1994:8) case studies allow one to collect data systematically. Nisbet and Watt as cited in Bell (1993:8), state that case studies are principally concerned with the interaction of factors and events, and sometimes one can only obtain a full picture of this interaction by using a practical instance or example. This study will be descriptive in nature, that is, describing focus areas of interventions; as well as perusing the issues that are important in the different developmental phases in the lives of children. The researcher aims to implement a programme of intervention with six learners who have experienced the trauma of their parents’ divorce.

Babbie et al (2001:72) cites that the researcher needs to know exactly what is going to be observed and analysed and should know why and how the phenomenon is going to be observed. The researcher aims to make use of structured observation within the natural therapeutic sessions with a sample of six children in order to gather information regarding how they may be feeling about divorce- related matters. The study intends to provide an indication of the children's responses in therapy. Written descriptions of behaviour and responses made by the children will be provided. Tape recordings may be used to gather additional narrative records. These narrative records will be studied, classified and organised as well as compared to research finding.

1.8 SUMMARY

This chapter aimed to contextualize the study. The motivation for the study was clearly explained. The chapter highlights the various signs and symptoms to look out for when working with children. These include the physical, behavioural and cognitive symptoms. An awareness of these symptoms can be useful for schools, especially since they are often the first role players to identify when children are in distress and sometimes they are the only resource at the children's disposal. The researcher has asked four pertinent research questions which she attempts to answer, by means of carefully selected research methodology and design, which will hopefully inform the conclusions that can be drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2. INTRODUCTION

Buchanan and Heiges in McIntosh (2003), contends that no age, stage or gender is immune to the effects of parental conflict associated with separation. McIntosh (2003: 69) states that there are noticeable differences between boys and girls regarding their reactions to marital conflict. Boys reportedly feel more threatened by their parents' marital conflict whilst girls tend to resort to blaming themselves. This would naturally influence how they adjust after their parents have divorced (Cumming, Davies and Simpson, 1994; Kerrig, 1998 in McIntosh, 2003:69).

A child learns to control his emotions and behaviours within the context of the family. This develops by parental soothing, the manner in which conflict is resolved, talking about emotions and by encouraging more adaptive responses. Thus, when this is lacking due to conflict in the family it interferes with a child's ability to control his emotions and to respond in a socially acceptable manner (McIntosh, 2003). Eleoff (2003) also concurs that divorce is an extremely stressful experience for all children regardless of age or developmental level – and often children are not prepared adequately for the divorce of their parents. According to Grych and Fincham(2001); Kelly, (2000) in McIntosh (2003:64) "...ongoing, unresolved parental conflict can serve as a threat to the developmental needs of children and threaten their psychological

growth. The developmental needs of children are best met in a secure family environment and emotional responsive parenting in all types of family structures. One can therefore infer that as long as the family environment is secure and emotionally responsive, irrespective of the type of family structure, that is, a single parent home, an intact family structure or any other,- the developmental needs of children can adequately be met.

In what follows the researcher will provide a review of what researchers have found regarding the reactions of children in different developmental phases, who have experienced the trauma of divorce. This will be followed by a discussion of the key role players in the lives of children when their parents get divorced as well as looking at what the elements or issues are that one needs to focus on, when dealing with divorce in a therapeutic context. Factors contributing to maladjustment as well as the protective factors, which enhance a child's post divorce adjustment, will be highlighted.

2.1 THE DEVELOPMENTAL PHASES OF CHILDREN

Certain developmental milestones according to McIntosh (2003) are easily interfered with due to the age-related ability to understand the different degrees and implications of conflict between parents. The developmental tasks or milestones that are particularly affected by family stressors are the following:

- The development of trust and understanding of cause and effect;
- The development of attachment;

- The experience of emotional arousal and regulation of affect;
- The development of internalized beliefs about oneself;
- The establishment of peer relationships;
- Adaptation to school and academic achievement.

The age and the developmental stage of children at the time of their parents' divorce determine their reactions when it occurs (Beekman, 1986). Eleoff (2003:1) also concurs that the reactions of children to divorce can be grouped according to age groups.

According to McIntosh (2003:68), children interpret conflict through their own developmental lens. In other words, the stage of development in which the child finds him or herself actually determines how the child will integrate the experience on an emotional level. This is similar for cognitive progression where the stage of development informs where the child is likely to be on an intellectual level (Winter, 2000). Lewis (2008:3) confirms that it is important to be cognisant of developmental issues when assessing trauma symptoms. He states that certain behaviours are common at specific stages of development, but may be an indicator of some disturbance at other age levels.

2.1.1 Early Latency phase (5-8years)

According to Beekman (1986), children during this phase of their lives react with huge sadness to their parents' divorce. The feelings they commonly experience are that of insecurity, helplessness and fear. They often also

experience guilt and tend to blame themselves for their parents' divorce. McIntosh (2003) states that five year olds tend to be more egocentric in their interpretation of conflict, which results in self-blame.

The effects of high conflict divorce, is worse for the pre-school child. This is due to the fact that their own coping resources are already taxed, having to deal with high parental conflict and the restructuring of the family (Wallerstein & Lewis, Zill, Morrison & Coiro, in McIntosh, 2003:66). Eleoff (2003:1) also found that pre-school children often react to their parents' divorce by regressing with regard to recent milestones that they have already achieved. For example, there may be sleep disturbances and extreme fear of separation from the custodial parent, as well as a yearning for the non-custodial parent.

In their study Adamson and Thompson (1998) found that children between the ages of 5 and 8 years attempt to help their parents in conflict by either acting out aggressively or by avoidance of the conflict altogether. During this phase children often experience replacement fantasies, or fantasies that their parents will still reconcile (Eleoff, 2003). This suggests that they seem to struggle to come to terms with the concept of permanency of their parents' divorce.

According to Neuman (1998:123), children in this age group are better able to follow instructions, express emotions, fear and problems verbally. They also yearn to be independent. During this stage they also seek to master and accomplish things in school, on the playground and among their peers. They

also seem to compare themselves to peers. As a result of this comparison, children's experience of divorce during this stage can be that of feeling different to their peers and this can make them feel vulnerable and alone. Their self-image is based on how they and others perceive their parents. Thus, a child desperately needs to perceive their parents as good in order to see the good in themselves. Any criticism of their parent is experienced as a criticism of themselves as well.

It is this very dependence or close identification to their parents that may explain why they may displace their anger towards a parent by striking out at a sibling, stepparent or friend, rather than admitting to feeling angry at a parent. During this stage, whilst they seem independent and self-sufficient children still require emotional comfort and reassurance of a warm hug. Younger children are affected by the emotions of others as well as, to the general atmosphere. Thus, the conflict between their parents within the home environment affect them emotionally.

Some children Neuman (1998) explains, act out aggressively, whilst others may mask their feelings of sadness about the divorce. Thus, one can conclude that children's responses to their parents divorce may be deceptive, in that some may appear to be coping. However, this may simply be a smoke screen for how they may really be feeling, as they may conceal their true feelings. Parents should therefore be vigilant to signals of withdrawal, depression and denial within their children. They should examine whether or not their children's reactions to the divorce are too unreal.

2.1.2 Late Latency phase (9-12 years)

During this phase children's feelings are characterized by intense anger and rejection. These are the predominant reactions to their parents' divorce, even though they still experience loneliness, shock, surprise and fear (Beekman, 1986). During parental conflict situations children within this age group may try to intervene by attempting to stop it (Adamson & Thompson, 1998). In a study conducted by Kerig (1999, 2001), it was found that children who actively intervene in parental conflict were found to be most symptomatic, with noticeable patterns of depression and anxiety. Similar to the other stages, children during this phase experience a sense of grief to the loss of a previously intact family (Eleoff, 2003:2).

2.1.3 Adolescence (13-18 years)

Children during this stage may experience two extremes in terms of their response to parental divorce. They may either respond, via aggressive behaviour or with acute depression, as cited by Eleoff (2003:2). During this phase there may even be suicide ideation, in response to the divorce.

Beekman (1986) argues that adolescents typically respond to parental divorce by acting out behaviours. These would include, getting involved in sexually promiscuous behaviour, the consumption of alcohol and drugs, aggression and delinquency. Adamson and Thompson (1998) stated the other extreme, in

that they purport that adolescents may also respond to parental conflict by means of avoidant behaviour. In other words, they may withdraw themselves, either emotionally or physically from the situation.

During the adolescent stage children also tend to evaluate their parents' divorce from a moral perspective and may judge their parents' decisions and actions (Eleoff, 2003:2). However, on the positive side children within this stage generally have the capacity to perceive integrity in their parents' post divorce relationship and have the ability to show compassion without neglecting their own needs.

According to Barnes (2002:3) the adolescent years are generally characterized by youth learning to trust and explore intimate relationships. However, when they experience a divorce during this time, this developmental stage may be interrupted or damaged due to their experience of seeing their role models disengage from the intimacy of their marriage. They might also experience some anxiety with regard to their own future relationships (Eleoff, 2003:2). This view is supported by McIntosh (2003:66) who states that the development of trust as a developmental milestone is particularly affected by family stressors. Thus, one can conclude that adolescents use their family situation as a frame of reference, which they may emulate. However, when divorce occurs within their families, their views on how the world works or how families ought to be, will be challenged. The development of trust is therefore impacted upon negatively by parental divorce, which can be considered, as a family stressor.

2.2 THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN DEALING WITH DIVORCE

According to Miller, Ryan and Morrison (1999:1) every educator needs to be aware of the impact of divorce on children's behaviour in class. Ongoing visitation issues, child support and parental custody can be a constant source of stress to children. In order to teach these children effectively, an understanding of the impact of divorce is essential, as well as a supportive environment, creating safe channels of communication for children and guidance regarding building coping and self-regulation skills. It is therefore important that educators understand the domestic circumstances of the learners whom they are teaching with a view to offering them the necessary support as the need arises.

2.3 THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN DEALING WITH DIVORCE

Miller et al(1999), contend that literature resources, that would enable parents to help their children deal with the divorce, would be helpful. It would thus be very useful, if parents obtained literature about the impact that the divorce process may have on their children as this would enable them to understand and support their children appropriately. According to Neuman (1998:4), the manner in which parents deal with their divorce plays a major role in how children will cope in the present as well as in the future. He contends that parents are better able to provide the necessary security, guidance, structure and support to their child. Fry and Addington (in Lampel,1986: 1) have

identified many factors that contribute to children's post divorce problems. These include the child's sex, parental coping styles, financial and social stability and the structure of custody and visitation.

In research conducted by Emery (2006) three areas have been identified as being important in the development of children's resilience in coping with divorce, namely, the parenting style of parents after the divorce; how parents handle their own emotions and how the parents interact and cooperate with each other. Children are risk for developing emotional difficulties when parents relinquish their parental responsibilities in divorce and when they fail to contain their own emotional issues. A failure to control their emotions can exacerbate and complicate legal issues, while abandoning their parental responsibilities may lead to children being deprived of an opportunity to be children.

According to Johnston and Campbell (1988), the dilemma of school going children, is embedded in the fact that, if they are not informed of the issues but witness their parents' distress they will appear to be more anxious. This could be attributed to the fact that their fantasies of what was happening were often worse than the reality. Parents are often perceptually and emotionally so focused on the opponent, that they seemed unaware that their children needed protection (Johnston & Campbell, 1988:154). This seems to be normal as divorce can be regarded as an extremely traumatic event for those who are directly affected. However, parental awareness of the emotional needs of their children, despite their own experience of this highly traumatic

event, is crucial and cannot be underestimated. It may even be ideal for parents to attend pre-divorce sessions if it means that it will contribute to better-adjusted children. Emery (2006) suggests that therapeutic intervention occurs not only a few months prior to the divorce, but two to three years after the divorce to work through emotional issues.

Johnston and Campbell (1988), maintain that children often experience a range of emotions when witnessing parental fights, for example, feeling distressed, frightened, anxious, staring helplessly, aggressive, anger, wilful behaviour, hitting or crying. The physical symptoms that may be experienced, includes, stomach aches, headaches, asthma and fever. The children, who avoided the disputes, by blocking their eyes or ears or retreating to their bedrooms were judged to be more adaptive in their responses and were regarded as psychologically and emotionally healthier children. Johnston and Campbell (1988:156), found that the most frantically distressed, lost and confused children were the ones, to whom access was never made clear, those in situations where plans kept changing and those who were snatched back and forth, as each parent acted unilaterally without respect to the child. Thus, one can conclude that, in order for children to be better adjusted, consistency in their lives is essential and they need to be kept informed about issues that affect them directly.

In what follows, I shall highlight the different levels on which therapeutic work could focus when dealing with children and divorce, that is, the feelings or

affective level, the cognitive or psychological level as well the behavioural level which focuses on teaching different skills.

2.4 AFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Richards and Bates (1997: 442) explain that the idea behind using affective coping strategies is that children may have rational or irrational fears that are real to them and these need to be acknowledged. The sheer act of expressing fears and feelings can be a good way of overcoming stress. The act of symbolically destroying fears allows the child to gain a sense of mastery or control, which results in improved self-esteem. Steps in the affective coping strategy as cited by Richards and Bates (1997:442) has been highlighted as follows:

- The child can be encouraged to create a picture of the event or what scares or traumatizes him or her the most.
- Various materials can be provided for this purpose for example, paper, pencil crayons, paints.
- The child can be asked questions relating to how the picture makes him or her feel.
- If the child expresses irrational fears then these can be discussed. It is recommended that concrete responses are given. If an explanation is given about their fears it should be stated that, whilst the fears may be real to them - it may not be possible. In other words, the child's fears are acknowledged, followed by an explanation that will help to dispel the child's fears.

- Real fears need to be discussed with them.
- They can also be asked to problem solve by asking them what they can do to avoid negative consequences.
- Possible solutions as generated by them needs to be acknowledged and further suggestions about other solutions could also be made. Role-plays are suggested to test the various solutions.
- The child is then encouraged to destroy their fears symbolically with a view to them taking control and defeating or destroying the picture. The child could choose the method of destruction e.g. cutting, ripping, tearing, stomping or throwing it away.
- Positive feedback is then given to the child, acknowledging how brave they were for facing their fear. Acknowledge that it is okay to get rid of fears and that he or she still remains a good person.

2.5 COGNITIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Cognitive coping strategies according to Richards and Bates(1997: 442), increase children's understanding of what happened and creates a supportive environment and safe place to discuss uncomfortable feelings. This can be done in a group but is not limited to it. The steps in the cognitive coping strategy are as follows:

- Find a quiet room that is free from distractions where children can gather. Seating should be arranged in a circle.
- It is recommended that rules are set for the group for example, there should be no talking out of turn; no negative remarks to others; no

leaving the group before it ends; no criticising others in the group; and everyone must share.

- Each child is given an opportunity to share what happened.
- Each child is then asked to share their feelings about what happened.
- Children are thanked for sharing and also encouraged to add comments. Details that were not clear are clarified by providing a brief summary of what was told.
- It is recommended that responses to stress are explained in developmentally appropriate terms. In other words, one would use language that is easy for children in different age groups to understand.
- A discussion about positive ways to deal with or handle stress can follow, for instance, bike riding, playing ball, deep breathing, walking, creating art, keeping a stress diary and getting sufficient sleep.

2.6 BEHAVIOURAL COPING STRATEGIES

Behavioural coping strategies according to Richards and Bates (1997) can be beneficial and can be used by anyone. They also contend that it is never too late to learn relaxation techniques. Behavioural coping strategies involve taking the child through a process of relaxation. The steps are as follows:

- One needs to find a quiet room where the child can lie down or relax in a comfortable chair.
- Explain the procedure to the child. The child is told to remain with their eyes closed as long as possible.

- The child is encouraged to breathe deeply, that is, in through the nose and out through the mouth, in slow deep breaths. The child is asked to imagine the breaths sinking all the way to their toes and feel the tension leaving their bodies with each exhale. Five deep breaths are allowed before returning to normal breathing.
- The child is spoken to in a slow calm voice as he or she tightens and relaxes each muscle group. The child is encouraged to feel the tension as he or she flexes a muscle, then to feel the tension escape as he or she relaxes the muscle. This process starts with the feet allowing 10 seconds for each tightening, followed by the legs, abdomen, shoulders, arms, hands, face and then all the muscles at the same time.
- The child can be asked how he or she feels. If no relief is experienced, then the process can be repeated.
- The child is encouraged to practice this relaxation technique nightly at bedtime in order to become more comfortable with the new skill.

2.7 BRIEF INTERVENTIONS WITH CHILDREN

According to Johnston and Campbell (1988: 175), intervention with children can be brief and comprises 4-6 play sessions. The aim is to help children to cope with the parental divorce and disputes. These sessions occur on a weekly basis and are intense and brief. In cases where families are severely disorganized by long-term conflict, or where a parent is psychologically disturbed and where the child is symptomatic, more extensive and ongoing therapy is recommended. The purpose of these sessions would also be to

prevent children from developing unrealistic fantasies that their parents will be reconciled.

Johnston and Campbell (1988:175), contend that the therapist working with the children, need to have the following characteristics: be warm, empathetic and be concerned about the needs of the child, and be sensitive and respectful about the child's problems. There should be an acknowledgement of how parental fights are scary, confusing, unfair, painful and maddening. The therapist will also be required to model objectivity, reasonableness and resourcefulness in coping with the child's dilemmas. Johnston and Campbell (1988), also advise that the therapist maintain the role of stable family consultant, and be able to relate to each family member, showing that it is possible to have a positive and equidistant relationship with both parents, despite parental differences.

It is suggested that the first session with the child is rather structured. This means that the therapist directs the meeting with the child. Sensitivity to the child's fears and feelings is also recommended. Another reason for being direct is to make the divorce disputes salient, with a view to accessing more directly, the child's coping skills and defensive stance. Clinical judgements are made regarding the children's central concerns and whether these are part of, or separate from, parental disputes.

The following are some of the questions that may be asked, after confidentiality has been established:

- Do they know what divorce means?
- Do their parents live apart?
- With whom do they live?
- When do they see their mom or dad?
- Are their parents able to talk with one another?
- What do their parents argue and fight about?

Several projective tasks can be employed during the initial assessment (Johnston and Campbell, 1988:176). Projective pictures typically evoke themes of parental conflict, divorce and troubled parent-child relationships. The ultimate goal of the intervention strategy would be to help children to obtain psychological distance from the dispute, maintain good relations with each parent and as a result, resume their own growth and development. The three sub-goals are:

- To provide children with age appropriate explanations of the custody and access arrangements, status of divorce and issues of parental conflict.
- To encourage children to express their own concerns and to separate their needs from those of their parents.
- To teach children coping and survival skills in the event that their parents continue the dispute.

Cognitive mastery sometimes helps with emotional mastery and coping. This is done by clarifying the facts surrounding the divorce and disputes. Children are also helped to distinguish between their fears and fantasies. Direct

questions are asked about what they were told about the divorce and issues under dispute or what they saw or overheard and what they concluded. This helps the therapist to demystify the situation and to promote their intellectual grasp of the problem. Misconceptions are also corrected during sessions and appropriate roles for children and adults are highlighted. When children have difficulty identifying with parents they could be helped to choose among the different qualities of both parents, those aspects they admire and respect and would like to emulate (Johnston and Campbell,1988:80). This also shows the child that they can relate to, appreciate and indeed love both parents. Problem solving skills are explored to capacitate them.

Parents are interviewed separately, or jointly, to help them to be more responsive to the changes in their child. For example, the child might be more, free to express his or her feelings compared to the past. Parents are encouraged to be more reassuring, tolerant and gratifying of these needs.

Depending on the age of the child a variety of projective play mediums can be made available, for example, dolls, houses, puppets, sand tray, miniature animals, painting, drawing materials, building blocks and a variety of games. Standard divorce related equipment would include two doll houses, with family dolls representing appropriate ethnic groups, furniture, cars and trucks.

2.8 FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE ADJUSTMENT OF CHILDREN AFTER THE DIVORCE PROCESS

McIntosh (2003: 63), states that parental separation can be seen as a coat of many different colours, and the process impacts on children differently over a period of time. Ongoing conflict between parents can interfere with children's developmental needs and can impact on their psychological growth (Grych & Fincham and Kelly in McIntosh,2003). Barnes (2002: 3) concurs that ongoing conflict before and after the divorce interferes with adjustment and prolongs the negative impact of the divorce.

According to Van Wyk and la Cock (1988:25) children's recovery from the divorce process depends on how parents themselves, actually deal with the divorce. These authors contend that the sooner parents are able to reach a point of stability, where routine and clarity is restored and can overcome the conflict between them the sooner children will adjust and reach a point of settling down. The nature of this parental conflict refers to high levels of anger and distrust, verbal abuse, difficulties in talking about their children or being cooperative as it relates to the care of the children, as well as attempts at trying to jeopardise the children's relationship with their other parent.

Barnes (2002:2) also agrees that the level of marital conflict is a predictor of child adjustment rather than the divorce itself or even post divorce conflict. It has been found that if children experience high levels of marital conflict then this may be a contributing factor to depression and the development of other

psychological disorders in young adults. The child's adjustment would be affected by factors such as the intensity and frequency of parental conflict, the manner in which conflict occurs and the way conflict is resolved, as well as whether or not there are any buffers for the child in order to lessen the effects of high conflict (Barnes, 2002:3).

According to Deacon-Wood and McIntosh (in McIntosh, 2003:64), parents at an impasse, are more likely to be emotionally distressed and have a disturbance of character, compared to non- impasse populations. Johnston (in McIntosh, 2003:64), claims that the extent, to which these attributes are reactions to the stress of divorce rather than enduring qualities, appears to be unclear.

Amato and Booth (in McIntosh, 2003:65), suggest that some children actually prosper after parental divorce. However, this depends upon whether or not divorce adds or removes stress from children's lives. It therefore seems evident, that it cannot be assumed that all children are naturally maladjusted after their parents' divorce. It does depend on the nature and intensity of the stressors that they are exposed to during their parents' divorce.

According to Kelly and Emery (2003: 353), several factors will determine to what extent children are affected in the short and the long -term.

These factors will be examined under the following headings: the stress of the initial separation, parental adjustment and resources, parental conflict and

cooperation, re-partnering of one or both parents, the stability of economic resources, the children's own individual resources.

2.8.1 The stress of the initial separation:

In research conducted by Hetherington (1979), as well as Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), children and adolescents usually experience the initial period of separation to be extremely stressful. Many authors concur that children do not have the necessary emotional preparation for their parents' separation. A range of emotions are experienced which includes distress, anxiety, anger, shock and disbelief (Hetherington, Cox and Cox, 1982; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980: 353). This can be attributed to inadequate preparation by their parents regarding the separation and divorce process.

The abrupt departure of one parent from the home (usually the father) can be experienced as very stressful. This stress is felt by younger children in particular, since they do not have the cognitive, emotional and language maturity to ask the necessary questions about the changes they are experiencing in their lives.

2.8.2 Parental adjustment and resources:

2.8.2.1 Parental conflict

A major source of stress for children whose parents are divorcing, is the persistent conflict (Emery,1982;Johnston,1994; Johnston and Roseby,1997).

According to King and Heard (in McIntosh, 2003:72) some conflict is not only characteristic of divorced families but is a norm for parenting of any kind. It is therefore important not to assume that conflict is only limited to divorcing families, but it can also be present in the so-called intact families.

Children experience marital conflict and violence in varying degrees. According to Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch (1991); Kelly and Emery, (2003: 353) excessive conflict between parents is likely to be more destructive when parents express their anger and aggression towards their partners through their children. This can also happen when talking on the telephone or face to face. This creates an enormous amount of stress within the children. McIntosh (2003:64), states that entrenched conflict is characterized by the following parental behaviours:

- a high level of anger and distrust,
- various episodes of verbal abuse,
- physical aggression,
- difficulties with regard to communicating about their children,
- lack of cooperation between the parents regarding the care of the children,
- sabotaging the relationship that the child enjoys with the other parent.

2.8.2.2 Diminished Parenting after Divorce

According to Kelly and Emery (2003:354), when parents are unsuitable in terms of their parenting style before or post-divorce, this serves as an added

stressor. Many authors concur that living with a depressed, disturbed, or character disorder parent after the divorce puts children at risk emotionally, socially and academically. Thus, when the issue of custody is discussed it would be of paramount importance for the legal system to take cognisance of the emotional and psychological stability of the parent who is earmarked to have sole custody of the children as a condition of the divorce process. An informed and well thought through custody process may contribute to the well adjustment of children after their parent's divorce. This can be regarded as a protective factor in children's post divorce adjustment. Furthermore, parents often have to integrate their emotional responses with being a single parent, as well as the social needs which impact on the adjustment of the children.

Hetherington (1999) contends that there is also a gender difference in how children adjust to the divorce situation. Boys are said to have more angry exchanges and contentious relationships with their mothers compared to girls due to coercive relationships between mothers and sons. This would be due to the fact that boys would essentially spend more time with their fathers during the marriage. This diminishes when parents separate (Hetherington, 1999:354). However, if parents are aware of different gender responses to divorce, then this can lead them to accommodate the situation where needed.

2.8.2.3 Loss of important relationships

According to Kelly and Emery (2003:354), children often experience the loss of significant relationships. These are relationships with close friends, with

extended and new family members, as well as with the non-custodial parent, who are usually the fathers. When parents move, this also impacts on the relationship and contacts between the children and the non-moving parent. Paternal re-marriage may also reduce paternal commitment to the children of the prior marriage especially if there are new children involved (Hetherington and Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington, 1999).

2.8.2.4 Stability of economic resources

Kelly and Emery (2003), contends that divorce contributes to a reduction in standard of living. This may be due to the fact that families may move from dual income homes to single income homes. This is regarded as an added stressor for children as they may no longer be able to participate in sports lessons or be part of organisations, which they might have found meaningful, prior to the divorce.

2.8.2.5 Repartnering and Remarriage of one or both parents:

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) argue that re-partnering may be most stressful to children when it happens too soon after the divorce. They may demonstrate feelings of anger and hatred towards those, whom they feel they are sharing with their parent. This may be due to the fear of losing their parent (Neuman, 1998:135).

2.9 PROTECTIVE FACTORS REDUCING THE RISK FOR CHILDREN AFTER THE DIVORCE PROCESS

According to McIntosh (2003:63) divorce as such, does not need to be harmful to children. Parental conflict and conflict resolution is referred to as a predictor of children's adjustment and coping with the divorce. It is the impact of entrenched parental conflict on the children's ability to cope with, and adjust to the separation. Kelly and Emery (2003) contend that many protective factors have been identified that may reduce the negative impact that divorce may have on children. These include the competency level of both the custodial and the non-custodial parent as well as the level of conflict between the parents after the divorce. According to Barnes (2002:3), fear, distress as well as other negative symptoms can be reduced when parents are able to resolve their conflict by negotiating or compromising rather than by verbal abuse or attacks.

2.9.1 Competency level of the custodial parent

When children are in the custody of parents who are deemed competent as well as relatively well functioning, then this serves as a protective factor which is associated with favourable outcomes in children(Kelly & Emery, 2003:356).

The psychological adjustment as well as the quality of the parenting skills of the custodial parent, is said to be the best predictor of children's psychological adjustment after the divorce. Parenting behaviours that are characterized by

warmth, emotional support, sufficient monitoring, discipline and the maintenance of developmentally appropriate expectations, often results in positive outcomes for children compared to children who have parents who are inattentive, offering little support and use harsh methods of discipline. McIntosh (2003:72) reported that if a child has a fairly good relationship with either one or both parents, then this certainly serves as a protective factor or buffer against the negative impact of divorce. Thus, parents are key role players in the adjustment of their children after the divorce process.

2.9.2 Non-Custodial Parents

Kelly and Emery (2003:356), refers to the "...appropriate parenting of non-resident parents" as a potential protective factor for children. They contend that the frequency of visits is not a reliable predictor of children's outcomes, as this is not an indicator of the quality of the parent-child relationship. According to Amato and Gilbreth (1999) children who enjoyed close relationships with their fathers, actually benefited from frequent visits especially when their fathers also played an active role in their lives. Furthermore, it was found that when fathers are involved with children's schooling, this also results in better grades (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997).

2.9.3 Low parental conflict

Minimal parental conflict after parents' divorce also serves as a protective factor, which contributes to children's adjustment. Kelly and Emery (2003),

states that in the majority of cases, parental conflict usually reduces in the first two to three years following the divorce. During this time parents become disengaged and have established separate lives. Johnston and Campbell (1988), Johnston and Roseby (1997: 357), contend that where conflict continues, parents are more likely to be emotionally unstable, character-disordered, and have the intention of revenge and control of their former spouses parenting. Thus, in instances, where children are identified as not being able to cope with their parents divorce, then perhaps the emotional stability of their parents need to be examined more closely, with a view to offering appropriate support.

2.9.4 Parental behaviour and attitude

Neuman (1998:133), states that parents need to ensure that their words are consistent with their non-verbal cues. Parents therefore need to engage in self-reflection and monitoring of their own behaviour as this will help with their children's self-esteem and reduce confusion about the divorce. The importance of parental behaviour and attitude is highlighted by Neuman (1998), as this either can contribute to maladjustment in children or may enhance their post divorce adjustment.

2.9.5 Maintaining a calm, positive attitude in the presence of your child

According to Neuman (1998:133), children rely and draw strength from the happiness of their parents. Children will flourish and feel secure in an

environment that is calm and positive. Only parents can create this for their children. Children may also have a need to keep to routines prior to the divorce, as this makes them feel secure and is comforting, which give them a sense of control in a situation that they had no control over, that is, their parents' divorce. The importance of maintaining a living environment that is conducive to peace and tranquillity is essential for children's emotional adjustment. By creating a living space which is predictable in terms of having consistent structures and routines can also contribute to well adjusted children after the divorce process.

2.9.6 Protection of the child's personal environment

When relocating after a divorce, children need a space that they can call their own with their favourite possessions as this also promotes feelings of comfort and security. (Neuman,1998:134). Parents therefore need to be attuned to the needs of their children.

2.9.7 Maintaining consistency

According to Neuman (1998:134), it will also help the child if parents are consistent in the application and setting of rules. Children are more likely to be happier and relaxed if rules are fairly similar from parent to parent. Parents need to be firm regarding unacceptable behaviour and offer reassurance, support and understanding when it is needed. Thus, by having similar rules and if parents agree with regard to acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, it

creates a situation that is predictable and stable within which children can thrive and develop.

2.10 SUMMARY

This chapter highlighted the various developmental milestones that are interfered with during family stressors, followed by a discussion of how children in different developmental phases of their lives react to their parents' divorce. There appeared to be no significant differences in the range of emotions that children experienced but rather in how they dealt with these emotions, given their development stage. This chapter also highlighted the three very important levels of therapeutic intervention, namely, the affective level, the cognitive level as well as the behavioural level of intervention.

The school and the parents certainly have a paramount role to play in the post divorce adjustment of children. This chapter contains a discussion of the factors contributing to the maladjustment as well as the protective factors contributing to the healthy adjustment of children. McIntosh (2003:65) argues that the potential problems caused by divorce for all children are not inevitable, nor can one make generalizations that all children are affected. However, as argued by Neuman (1998), the role of parents in post divorce adjustment is pivotal.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will elaborate on epistemology and will provide a description of the research design and data collection strategies. Epistemology can be defined as the theory of knowledge. The root word *episteme* meant “knowledge” in Greek and in early modern times the corresponding Latin word “*scientia*” meant “organized knowledge”. In other words it looks at how knowledge is acquired in a systematic manner, which is the purpose of this chapter.

The quality of any empirical study and the significance of its findings lie in its research design. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:2), states that research is a process whereby scientific knowledge is gathered by methods and procedures that are objective. Objectivity is a term that implies that the research does not rely on personal feelings or opinions but rather on specific methods at each stage of the research process. The aims of a particular research project will define which methods would be most appropriate to use. Leedy (1993:139), concurs that the choice of research methodology will be determined by the nature of the information and the problem being investigated. The nature of this study necessitates that a qualitative approach of enquiry is employed. Myers (2000:4) contends that since qualitative

research is based on its own specific epistemological foundations, it has its own view on ways to contribute to knowledge, to the community and society.

Qualitative researchers essentially focus on questions to be answered rather than on procedures to be followed which is characteristic of a quantitative approach (Becker, 2010:9). Qualitative studies can be seen as tools used to describe and understand the world of human experience (Myers,2000:1). Hence, this empirical study aims to examine the impact of divorce on children in a school setting. In doing so the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the issues that children experience when their parents get divorced.
- What is the impact of divorce on children in various developmental phases.
- How children can be helped to deal with their parent's divorce.
- What are the protective factors that would help children cope more effectively.

3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In what follows the researcher will further expound on the research design adopted during this empirical study.

The research will be approached from an anti-positivist perspective. This approach is known as a qualitative approach, according to Welman et al, (2005:7). Qualitative research is a method of inquiry appropriated in many

different academic disciplines, but is traditionally used in social sciences. Qualitative methods usually produce information on particular cases that were studied. Positivists (or the quantitative approach) in contrast, focus on studying observable human behaviour while anti-positivists (qualitative perspective) focus on the experiences of human behaviour. Stated differently, positivists aim to discover general laws of relationships and or causality that are universally applicable to all people while phenomenologists are concerned with understanding human behaviour from the perspectives of the people who are involved in the study. The researcher has included six learners in the study who have experienced the trauma of their parents' divorce. Thus, their experiences are important and will be highlighted. Denzin and Lincoln (in Welman et al, 2005: 8) also maintain the aims of qualitative research methods as being the establishment of the socially constructed nature of reality. The focus is therefore, on subjective data that are produced by the minds of respondents or interviewees. Information is reported on in the form of language as opposed to numbers.

Qualitative researchers aim to achieve an "insider's" view by talking to subjects or observing their behaviour in a subjective manner (Welman et al, 2005:8). A qualitative approach aims to understand the respondents and their social world. In other words it aims to discover meaning and understanding. This is done through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions and through their observable behaviour which is rich with meaning (Wildemuth in Myers, 2000:1).

Researchers adopting a qualitative paradigm also utilize a holistic approach to gathering information, for example, they would use records, photos, observations, interviews and case studies. Since qualitative research is holistic by nature, it is concerned about human beings in all of their complexities (Myer,2000: 4). Qualitative researchers are concerned with the validity of their research, since the objective of the study must be representative of what the researcher is investigating. The focus is usually on smaller samples of people, who are studied by means of methods that are in-depth.

This is in contrast to a quantitative approach of investigation which stresses the measurement analysis of causal relationships between variables, within a value-free context according to Denzin and Lincoln (in Welman et al, 2005: 8). Information is obtained in a complex and structured manner and evaluated objectively using numbers.

The challenges of a qualitative paradigm is the value of its dependence on small samples which is believed to interfere with it's generalizability (that is the degree to which findings can be generalized to the entire population) and it is often criticized for the lack of objectivity. However, according to Myer (2000:2) partial generalizations may be possible to similar populations, and she further argues that qualitative research is significant in its own right. Furthermore, she states that one should rather bear the goals of the study in mind as well as the reality of the situation as opposed to the problems of generalizations or sampling.

3.2 CASE STUDY

A case study is a method of research that is common in social sciences. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:193), the term case study refers to the fact that only a limited number of units can be analyzed and studied intensively. Individuals, groups and institutions are seen as units of analysis. Case studies allow one to understand the uniqueness of a case in all its complexity. Berg (2007:283), also describes case studies as an approach that enables one to examine both simple and complex phenomena and it can meaningfully make use of and contribute to the application of theory. Case studies are therefore useful in that it allows the researcher to have an in-depth focus on a specific situation and attempts to identify the various interactive processes at work. According to Myer(2000:2)the value of a small sample is embedded in the fact that one can examine situations thoroughly and from various perspectives. Smaller qualitative studies can also yield a more personal understanding of the phenomenon and the results could potentially contribute valuable knowledge to the community.

For the purpose of this study the researcher selected six individual children who have experienced the divorce of their parents. As cited in Bell (1993) case studies that are carried out systematically, critically and are relatable are considered to be valid forms of educational research. This would add credibility and validity to the findings.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

Babbie and Mouton (2001:132), contends that the aim of sampling in social research would be to produce a representative selection of a population. Those who make up the sample are referred to as subjects or participants (Mertens, 1994: 4). When conducting research, data is collected from the objects of our enquiry in order to solve the problem concerned. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:5), contend that the population is the study object. The study object consists of individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events or conditions to which they are exposed.

For the purpose of this study the researcher has made use of purposive sampling which is based on the researcher's judgement. Purposive sampling relies on the experience of the researcher and previous research findings, to deliberately obtain units of analysis so that they may be regarded as representative of the relevant population. The researcher has drawn a sample of participants from schools in the Cape Town area. These schools fall within the catchment area of the district office referred to as, the Education Management and Development Centre (EMDC): Central Metropole in which the researcher is employed. Six cases (four learners from a primary school and two from a secondary school) were selected for the purpose of this research study.

The criteria for the selection of the learners to participate in this study included the following:

- The learners must be of school going age.
- The learners must have experienced the trauma of their parents' divorce.

3.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 Interviews

An Interview according to Berg (2007:89), is a conversation with the specific purpose to gather information. He furthermore states that interviews are useful as methods of collecting data for certain types of research questions and for addressing certain types of assumptions. It allows the researcher to clarify any unclear questions or uncertainties. Goodwin (2008:443), identified the drawbacks of the interview approach as being costly logistically complicated and interviewers may be biased.

The researcher made use of an unstructured interview schedule in order to gather information. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), contend that unstructured interviews are generally informal and are useful to explore a specific area of interest in depth. Unstructured interviews do not have a predetermined list of questions, but the researcher needs to have clarity regarding what issues he or she hopes to explore. This type of interview is also called a non-directive approach in that the interviewees are allowed to talk freely about events that are related to the topic. Unstructured interviews are usually utilized in qualitative research with a view to identifying important variables pertaining to a specific area. This enables the researcher to ask questions of a sensitive and emotional nature, in an attempt to understand

how individuals experience their life-worlds (first hand) as well as how they make sense of what is happening to them (Ibid:198)

The questions that are posed need to relate to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions pertaining to the theme. Unstructured interviews were conducted with parents to elicit useful background information into the family history that may have impacted on the child. Unstructured interviews were also conducted with the learners' respective educators, to ascertain their perceptions of the presenting problem and the children's adjustment.

3.4.2 Observation

Scientific knowledge in this research study will be obtained by means of systematic observation rather than selective observations. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:4), states that when we use selective observation we only pay attention to information supporting our preconceptions rather than those that do not.

Observation is a simple research method where the skill of the researcher is relied upon to focus attention to detail with the necessary precision. Data was collected by means of the observation method. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:282), observation could contribute to the provision of rich or detailed descriptions in qualitative research. It includes the observation of non-verbal data such as expressive movement, facial expressions as well as

any physical presentation such as the clothing worn by the participant. Observational data was supported with detailed field notes.

3.4.3 Field Notes

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:285), assert that the researcher needs to make notes of everything that is seen or heard. Welman et al (2005:199), describes field notes as detailed notes and observations that are made by the researcher. The use of tape recorders can also be useful in this situation. Notes should be taken while in the setting or very soon after the session. The purpose of note keeping is to assist researchers to stay on track and it helps the researcher to distinguish between relevant and non-essential information. During this study the researcher made copious notes which were later typed up for legibility.

3.4.4 Questionnaire

A self-report questionnaire was given to parents to complete in order to obtain collateral information. It provided relevant background formation including the developmental history of each participant. Whilst self- reports questionnaires are quicker to administer than an interview, one should be aware that respondents might not be completely honest according to Mcleod (1994: 65). The researcher also needs to be cognisant of the literacy level of respondents in that they may not always understand the questions contained in the questionnaire. The researcher therefore used the questionnaire as part of an

unstructured interview with the parents. During the initial interview, unclear issues in the questionnaire were clarified.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Data can be described as the information that is yielded during the research process by means of observation, experimentation, measurement or any other systematic process (Plug, Louw, Gouws and Meyer, 2007: 58). Data analysis according to De Vos, et al (2002:339), is a way of organizing and giving meaning to a body of data that has been collected. Mouton (2001:108), maintains that data analysis involves the “breaking up” of data into workable themes, patterns, tendencies, patterns and relationships. Thus, it is aimed at identifying themes in raw data.

Since this study is approached from a qualitative perspective this approach requires researchers to carefully code data and to document themes in a consistent manner. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:211), raw field notes need to be processed before it can be analysed. This involves what is referred to as write-ups. Write-ups should be legible, be edited for accuracy, commented on and be analysed. The researcher has followed this process of data analysis. There was a focus on theme identification. According to Welman, et al (2005:211), themes can be seen as “umbrella constructs” which are identified by the researcher before, after and during the data collection process. Themes can also be identified by studying the original field notes. According to Mayan(2001:22) data can be analysed by a

mean of a process called coding. Coding involves identifying words, phrases, themes or concepts that appear persistently in the responses of participants.

For the purpose of this study the researcher recorded and included verbatim responses of all six participants. The raw data or information that emerged from the sessions was coded and classified according to the following broader themes:

- Family Dynamics: Pre-Divorce
- Family Dynamics: Post Divorce
- Emotions experienced
- Academic support at school
- Social adjustment
- Emotional adjustment

Table 3.5 provides an example of how data was analysed and responses classified according to the broader themes. This process was carried out for each participant and the responses were collated.

Table 3.5 AN EXAMPLE OF THE DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Participant 1 (Rizia)	Response	Theme classification and formulation of hypothesis
Reasons why parents get divorce	<p>“They are rude to each other”</p> <p>“They fight with one another”</p> <p>“They throw the stuff on the floor and hit one another”</p> <p>“They throw things away from each other e.g. blankets, pots, the broom and the bed”</p> <p>“They break the window”</p>	Family dynamics: pre-divorce – conflict between biological parents; verbal abuse; physical abuse.
What changes have you noticed after your parent’s divorce?	<p>“We see mom every second weekend”</p> <p>“It felt better when my daddy fetched me”</p> <p>“my dad met aunty Naz”</p> <p>“She brought her two children with”</p>	Family dynamics: post divorce – adapting to changes after the divorce; visitation to non-custodial parent every fortnight; parent step-sibling relationship.
Feelings which comes up when thinking about my parent’s divorce	<p>“Sad”</p> <p>“Crying”</p> <p>“Unhappy”</p>	Emotions experienced
Report by participant’s biological father and educator.	<p>Concerns about academic progress.</p> <p>Weak academic performance.</p> <p>Remedial intervention</p>	Academic adjustment-academic support received.
Report by participant’s biological father and educator.	<p>Has many friends at school.</p>	Social adjustment-well adapted.
Report by participant’s biological father and educator.	<p>Quiet at home.</p> <p>Doing fine emotionally.</p> <p>Happy at school</p>	Emotional adjustment

3.6. VALIDITY/RELIABILITY

The main aim of any research that is undertaken is that the results should be valid and reliable. In qualitative research validity and reliability take on different forms compared to quantitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 391). Research that is conducted in an ethical manner is one way of ensuring validity and reliability. In qualitative research, each participant's experience and definition of his or her world and the phenomenon that is researched, is unique.

In this research an attempt was made to ensure validity. Validity means that research can be regarded as meaningful, sound or well grounded, based on principles or evidence (Cohen and Swerdlik, 2004:154). According to Lincoln and Guba (in De Vos, et al 2002:351-352), alternative constructs to internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity have been proposed, as they claim that these are inappropriate in qualitative research. They have suggested the following constructs instead, namely, credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity) and dependability (reliability).

3.7 CREDIBILITY/INTERNAL VALIDITY

De Vos, et al (2002: 351), states that the goal of credibility is to ensure that the enquiry was conducted in a manner which accurately describes and identifies the subject. In this study, credibility will manifest in the way in which the researcher portrays the perceptions and the lived reality of the

participants. With this in mind however, the following becomes important, that is, the setting, the population and the theoretical framework of the researcher, as it plays a crucial role in defining the parameters within which the study was conducted. De Vos, et al (2002), claims that the limitations and boundaries placed on this study makes it valid. Wolcott (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 393), argues that qualitative researchers do not claim that there is just one or absolute way of interpreting a situation. However, there are ways of ensuring the credibility of a study, which will be briefly discussed.

3.8 TRIANGULATION

Triangulation as discussed by Denzin and Lincoln (2000:443), is a process of applying multiple methods of data collection to “clarify meaning and to verify the repeatability of an observation or interpretation”. This was achieved by recognizing various ways that the phenomena were perceived.

This study utilized multiple methods of data collection, which included background questionnaires, interviews and observations during the therapeutic process. Multiple data sources included the participants, the educators and parents of the school. This allowed the researcher to check the information received for consistency. Descriptions of the cases have been included. The findings were discussed with other psychologists employed at the Educational Management Development Centre (EMDC). Merten (1998:183), stresses that triangulation involves checking one’s information

that has been collected from different sources to ensure relative consistence of evidence.

3.9 TRANFERABILITY/EXTERNAL VALIDITY

According to Merriem (1998:207), the aim is not to generalize the findings in qualitative research, as in quantitative research. The aim is to provide a detailed description of cases and it's phenomena. However, according to De Vos et al (2002: 352), multiple sources of data as well as multiple cases could strengthen the appropriateness of this study, to other settings. Six participants were used in this study, in order to demonstrate its appropriateness.

3.10 DEPENDABILITY/RELIABILITY

Reliability in quantitative research refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. It is also based on the premise that the universe is unchanging, yielding consistent results (Merriam, 1998: 204 and De Vos et al, 2002:352) This view is contrary to the qualitative paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 394), are of the view that the value of a case study is in its uniqueness (containing rich descriptions, capturing the lived experiences and contexts of the participants) and thus, they regard replication as pointless.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Welman, et al (2005), highlight four ethical considerations of which researchers should take heed. Participants, that is, parents, educators and learners should be informed truthfully about the purpose of the interview and investigation before giving their consent. Written consent is needed if learners are minors. They should also be assured that the school name would not be mentioned. Researchers should also respect participants' right to privacy and thus they need to be assured of anonymity in order to protect their identity, as sensitive information might be shared. Several authors stress the importance of confidentiality and anonymity (De Vos, et al 2002: 354; Merten, 1998:24). Participants should also be assured that they will be protected from physical psychological and emotional harm whilst being participants. The researcher conducted the investigation with these ethical considerations in mind.

In this study written consent was obtained from the parents after the research purpose and process was explained to them. Any misconceptions were clarified. Since the research participants were minors, the researcher took care in using language that was reasonably understandable in order to explain the purpose and process of the research and to obtain their assent. The relevance of the research topic to their life experiences also contributed to their assent. Once rapport was established the participants were informed that they were free to participate in or withdraw from the research if they so wished. This demonstrated respect for the participants' personal decisions. During the therapeutic sessions they were also assured by the researcher that

as participants there were no right or wrong answers to questions, that were posed to them.

The role of the researcher who was also an intern psychologist was clearly explained and participants were informed about what to expect during the sessions. The researcher recognised the fact that a dual role was fulfilled during the research process. A dual role exists whenever a therapist interacts with clients in beyond the one role of therapist for example, that of intern psychologist as well as of researcher. Dual roles may interfere with the therapeutic relationship. The strategies that were put in place to ensure a rigorous study were the following:

- Firstly, the researcher had an acute awareness of how a dual role may impact on the therapeutic relationship.
- Secondly, the researcher established clear therapeutic goals for each therapeutic session which provided a clear focus during the sessions. The aim of the therapeutic sessions was to empower the participants which is the view held by Bourdeau(2000) who states that this is a common goal of qualitative research and therapy.
- Thirdly, collateral information was obtained from parents and educators by means of questionnaires and interviews. During this process it is the responsibility of the researcher and or the intern psychologist to listen carefully and to ask probing questions, which is what makes qualitative research and therapy structurally similar (Bourdeau,2000). The collateral information was supported by the observations made by the researcher which included both the verbal and non-verbal

behaviour of the participants. It is the view of the researcher that psychologists are sufficiently trained in the skill of observation and the importance of detailed note taking. This helped the researcher to remain on track and to reflect on the processes after each session. According to Bourdeau(2000:1) qualitative methods resemble what many practitioners do in everyday practice. Whenever, therapists enter into a professional relationship with their clients they have to be aware of many issues that may impact on their clients.

- Finally, it was the aim of the researcher to act in a manner that respected the participants, to act in a way that was nonmaleficence (to do no harm) and to work to the benefit (beneficence) of the participants involved.

3.12 SUPPORT PROCESS

The support process involved the intake interview as well as the termination interview with the parents of the participants. During the initial interview, information was obtained from the parents about the children's development; circumstances and problems pertaining to the divorce; current scholastic performance and any relevant information that had contributed to the crises that they were experiencing in school. The initial reasons for referral were explored. Educators were interviewed to establish their concerns about the participants' scholastic performance and emotional adjustment after their parents' divorce. The support process commenced after the interviews were conducted. The support programme for participants included 7 sessions of

therapeutic intervention. Parents and educators were later interviewed to ascertain whether any noticeable changes were noted in participants' behaviour both at home as well as in the classroom.

3.13 THE CONTEXT

In order to understand and interpret case studies, the researcher needs to understand the context in which the research was conducted (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:282). The research was conducted at one primary and one high school in the Western Cape. The primary school has two classes per grade from grades R to Grade seven whilst the high school has six classes per grade from grades eight to grades twelve.. The school draws learners from both lower socio-economic areas as well as from middle class communities.

The schools have fully functioning Educator Support Teams (EST's) that are co-ordinated by EST co-ordinators. The EST is designed to support educators who experience learners with learning barriers. These barriers include scholastic, psycho/socio- emotional and language barriers. The primary school enjoys the services of an itinerant learning support educator thrice per week whose role it is to support learners experiencing barriers to effective learning. Learners are seen and supported within a smaller group context to work on areas of difficulty.

The schools are well managed and have a wonderful inviting and warm atmosphere in which one feels welcome. The children appear to be happy and excited during and after intervals. The educators seem committed and happy to be at school. The impression that the researcher gleaned from the visits to the respective schools, was that they seemed like a family. The secretaries were always bubbly, friendly and very efficient in setting up appointments for the researcher's school visits. They were a great source of support to the educators and the school as a whole.

The researcher is employed by the Western Cape Education Department within the district office referred to as the Education Management and Development Centre ((EMDC), as an intern educational psychologist and is responsible for rendering psycho-therapeutic support to thirty eight schools. The researcher travels to schools to do all the assessments and therapy cases. All the interviews with parents and educators as well as the therapeutic support processes were conducted at the schools. The dates and times of visits were pre-arranged with the secretary as well as the Educator Support Team (EST) co-ordinator. The learning support educator's room was used on a weekly basis at the primary school, whilst at the high school a special room was allocated for the learners to be seen.

3.14 SUMMARY

In this chapter the research design and methodology was discussed. The instruments used in data collection and methods of data analysis were outlined. The therapeutic setting, support process and ethical issues were highlighted. In what follows, the researcher will discuss the implementation of the study where each participant will be discussed in detail.

CHAPTER 4 - DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall discuss the implementation of the six case studies. Participants were selected from three different families. Two siblings were included from each family. Participant 1 (Rizia) aged seven years and participant 2 (Kylie) aged eleven years, are siblings. Participant 1 came to the attention of the researcher when her educator was concerned about her progress at school. Participant 2 (older sibling) was referred by her father who felt that she could also benefit from the therapeutic intervention that had been planned for her sister. Participant 3 (Jack) aged 14 years, and participant 4 (Jill) aged 18 years are siblings as well as participant 5 (Jordan) aged 11 years and participant 6 (Jade) aged 7 years are siblings. Cases will be discussed in terms of the individual therapeutic sessions and or clinical assessment where necessary. The reflections of the therapist will be included after each session.

4.1 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 1 (Rizia)

4.1.1 Reason for Referral

Rizia was referred for an assessment as she experienced difficulties with Reading, Spelling, Language and Mathematics. Her handwriting and attention was also indicated as areas of concern. Her parents had also

reportedly requested an assessment due to problems of an emotional nature at home e.g. they were divorced and both parents had re-married other partners.

The following is a verbatim account of participant 1's feelings in relation to her biological mother's new relationship.

"Sometimes my mommy leaves me alone while I watch television. She locks the door. I got scared. She stays away long.

Sometimes she says we can't sit by her and her husband to watch T.V. Me and my sister must sit in the kitchen alone. My mommy's husband's child can only watch T.V.

Tina (pseudonym) pulls my mommy away from me. Then my mommy holds her hand. She says it is her mommy. It hurts me and makes me sad.

Mommy holds Tina's hand and walks with her on the one side. I walk alone on the other side of the road.

When I want to be with my mommy, Tina pulls me away from her. My mommy says nothing.

I don't think my mommy loves me or my sister. She is more over Tina. I want to go to live by my mommy. I miss and love my mommy. I don't think she wants me to live by her. When I get hurt my mommy do nothing. When I cry my mommy hits me. She only hits me, not Tina. "

4.1.2 Background Information

- Family

Rizia is a seven-year-old little girl who is currently in grade 3. She has an older sister who is eleven years old and currently in grade 6 and a stepsister aged one year. They attend a primary school in Cape Town. Their parents have been divorced since 2004. Rizia and her sister live with their biological father and his second wife who was also married previously and has two boys of her own aged 9 years and 11 years respectively, who is also in her custody. Rizia and her sister see their biological mom every second weekend (every fortnight). Their biological mother has also remarried. Her new husband has an eight-year-old daughter from his previous marriage. Rizia's father described the domestic circumstances as being extremely volatile prior to the divorce. His ex-wife was reportedly a patient at the Valkenberg Mental Health Hospital in Maitland, Cape Town for two months where she received treatment for depression. During that time she tried slitting her wrists in the presence of her elder daughter. She was on medication for depression during her pregnancy. Rizia's father reported that her depression was at it's worst during the marriage and it affected the communication with the children. She displayed a lot of aggression towards the children by hitting them a lot. He reported that it seemed as though she experienced a moment of "splitting" when it happened. He often did not know what to expect. Rizia's mother's current marriage is described as being characterised by domestic violence where she as well as her stepdaughter gets hit physically.

- Birth and Development

He reported that her birth was unplanned and that there were no complications. Her mother was on medication for depression during her pregnancy.

- Behaviour

Rizia was described as being quiet, but gradually getting better. Within the classroom her behaviour is generally described as satisfactory. However, Rizia tends to be withdrawn and dreamy. She is sometimes sleepy and her concentration span is short. Rizia has many friends at school. She enjoys riding her bike during her free time.

- Scholastic

Rizia father was more concerned about the emotional impact of the divorce on her functioning, as she was very quiet at school. Her educator described her academic performance as being below average and she merely completed tasks with a view to get it done rather than with much care.

- Previous Intervention and Support

Rizia received remedial support at school level. Her educator also offered intervention after school.

- Behaviour and Observation during the Assessment

During the first session Rizia appeared a bit quiet and slightly tense and anxious, as this was evident in her irregular breathing but later settled

comfortably into the session. She was neatly attired and her hair was combed neatly.

4.2 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 2 (Kylie)

4.2.1 Reason for Referral

Kylie was referred to the therapist with the view to supporting her emotionally after her parents' divorce as a preventative measure i.e. to prevent the development of adverse emotional difficulties in the long term. She was reportedly coping very well academically and was described as being like a tomboy. There were no previous interventions.

4.2.2 Background Information

- Family

Kylie is 11 years old. Her family history is the same as Rizia's as they are biological sisters.

- Birth and Development

Kylie was the first born child. The pregnancy was planned and there were no complications. All developmental milestones were reached according to the expected norm.

- Behaviour & Socialization

Kylie has many friends at school. It was reported that she gets along very well with her peers, both at school and at home.

- Scholastic

There were no concerns about Kylie's scholastic progress. She was coping well in her grade 6 class. Kylie reportedly attended two other primary schools in the Western Cape before being admitted to her current school. The reason that she moved schools was because her parents had moved homes. Her father was more concerned about the emotional impact that the divorce may have had on her.

- Behaviour and Observation during the initial session:

Kylie felt comfortable coming to the sessions with her sister being there. She impressed as a real big sister who was caring and supportive of her younger sibling. She smiled readily and communicated freely, with the therapist and with her sister. She presented as physically neat and looked well cared for.

Participants 3 and 4 were seen jointly because they were both in the adolescent stage of development. They are siblings and thus shared common family experiences.

4.3 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 3 (Jack)

4.3.1 Reason for referral

Jack was referred for therapeutic intervention because his parents were divorced three years ago. The school and his parents felt that he would benefit from therapeutic intervention in order work through the issues related to his parent's divorce.

4.3.2 Background Information

- Family

Jack is 14 years old and is in grade 8. He has an elder sister aged 18 years old and currently in grade 12. They attend a high school in the Cape Town area. Their parents have divorced in 2006. Jack and his sister Jill are in the custody of their mother. They spend every second weekend with their father. Both their parents are involved in new relationships. The domestic environment is described as peaceful and organised. Prior to the divorce the atmosphere was extremely tense and there were incidences of verbal arguments in the presence of the children.

- Birth and Development

Jack's mother reported that his birth was unplanned and there were no complications during pregnancy or during the birth process. He was described as a healthy baby and he reached all his developmental milestones according to the expected norm.

- Behaviour

Jack is described as well behaved at school. His educators reported that it is often difficult to tell what he might be feeling as he rarely shows any emotion in class. He is described as not particularly happy or sad. He just gets on with what he is supposed to do in class. He is actively involved in sport at school and is eager to attend school every day.

- Scholastic

Jack is described as a student who is underachieving academically even though he passes his grades from year to year. He had reportedly been assessed by a Psychologist in private practice, who reported that he was a student whose intellectual functioning fell within the Superior range of intelligence. This was measured on the Senior South African Individual Scale-Revised (SSAIS-R)

- Previous Intervention and Support

A Psychologist in private practice assessed Jack in 2007 to determine his intellectual strengths and weaknesses.

- Behaviour and observation during the assessment

Jack initially appeared to be quiet and reticent but later as he felt increasingly relaxed he started participating spontaneously.

4.4 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 4 (Jill)

4.4.1 Reason for referral

Jill was referred for therapeutic intervention because her parents were divorced three years ago. The school and her parents felt that she would benefit from therapeutic intervention in order work through the issues related to her parent's divorce.

4.4.2 Background Information

- Family

Jill is an 18 year old student in grade 12. She has a younger brother in grade 8. Her family history is the same as that for Jack because they are siblings.

- Birth and Development

Jill's mother reported that she was a planned baby. There were no birth complications and she reached all her milestones according to the expected norm.

- Behaviour

Jill's educators reported that she was a student whose behaviour was exemplary. She was nominated as one of the matric leaders at the school whose duty it is to support the educators and students where necessary.

- Scholastic

Jill is described as a hard working student. She gets very good grades and is extremely goal directed. She is actively involved in her school and is also a very good hockey player. She has been selected to represent her school at a hockey tournament in Beijing.

- Previous Intervention and Support

None.

- Behaviour and observation during the assessment

Jill soon settled into the sessions once she understood what the purpose of the sessions was. She co-operated very well and responded spontaneously during the session.

Participants 5 (Jordan, aged 11 years) and participant 6 (Jade aged 7 years) were seen together as they were siblings from the same family unit. The younger sibling is in the early latency phase of his development and the older one, in the late latency phase of his development.

4.5 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 5 (Jordan)

4.5.1 Reason for referral

Jordan was referred for therapeutic intervention, as his educator was concerned that he was very quiet at school. His parent agreed that he might benefit from the sessions that were offered at school.

4.5.2 Background Information

- Family

Jordan's parents divorced in 2005. Jordan is the second eldest of three siblings. He has an older sister aged 16 years and a younger brother, Jade aged 7 years. Jordan and his two siblings are in the custody of his biological father. The school described his custodial parent as being very stable who has the children's best interest at heart. They enjoy a very loving and close

relationship with one another. Their biological mother is currently cohabiting with her new partner. Her domestic atmosphere is described as tense at times and often characterised by domestic violence.

- Birth and Development

Jordan's father reported that he had been a planned baby. There were no complications during pregnancy or during the birth process. All developmental milestones were reached within normal limits.

- Behaviour

Jordan was described as a well-behaved boy. He has many friends at school with whom he gets along very well. He is actively involved in playing soccer at both school and club level.

- Scholastic

Jordan is coping very well academically. He has also been nominated to be a prefect at his school.

- Previous Intervention and Support

None

- Behaviour and observation during the assessment

Jordan appeared to be very quiet during the first session. It was noted that he bites his nails, as they were extremely short.

4.6 CLINICAL ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANT 6 (Jade)

4.6.1 Reason for referral

Jade was referred for therapeutic intervention as it was felt that he may benefit being part of the sessions with his elder brother. As the session progressed he warmed up to the researcher.

4.6.2 Background information

- Family

Jade is a 7-year-old learner. He is the youngest of three siblings. His family history is the same as that for Jordan. Jade was about three years old when his parents got divorced. His limited memory and experiences of his parents' divorce is reflected in the nature of his responses.

- Birth and Development

Jade's father reported that he was an unplanned baby. His father reported that all milestones were reached within the normal limits except for his speech, which developed later.

- Behaviour

Jade is described as a learner who loves to play with his friends at school. He sometimes gets involved in fights at school. He reportedly responds well when spoken to about his behaviour.

- Scholastic

Jade has repeated his grade one-year because it was felt that he was not ready to progress to grade two. It was reported that he had lacked the early childhood stimulation as enjoyed by his two elder siblings because his parents got divorced when he was just two years old. He was looked after by their domestic worker and did not attend any playgroup with other children.

- Previous Intervention and Support

None

- Behaviour and observation during the assessment

Jade was slightly shy to share his views. Once he started feeling more comfortable within himself and with the therapist he gladly started sharing his views and participated more freely.

4.7 GENERAL THERAPEUTIC GOALS

The therapist decided on a brief intervention approach as cited by Johnson & Campbell (1988:175), which included a limited number of sessions. The goal was to create a supportive environment within which the participants could express their feelings and grow in their understanding of divorce and how the divorce-related issues affect them. The sessions included affective and cognitive coping strategies as endorsed by Richards and Bates (1997:442.) The former refers to the opportunity to express fears and feelings with a view to overcoming stress. This allows children to destroy their fears in a symbolic

manner and hence experiences a sense of mastery, which results in enhanced self-esteem. Cognitive coping strategies allows for participants to increase their understanding about what happened and creates a climate within which they are able to share uncomfortable feelings. This was possible because participants were seen in pairs. Another goal was to teach them problem solving and anger management skills that would help them adjust to their new family structure and to their current way of life.

Many of the sessions involved playing feelings games where they role-played the different feelings in order for them to get in touch with or access their own feelings, as well as playing games for fun which also helped them to relax during the session. All participants reported that they enjoyed the games that were played. According to Oaklander (1978:165), playing is useful not only for directing the process of therapy but also helps the therapist to establish rapport with the child. It also helps the child to get past the initial resistance and promotes mutual trust (Oaklander,1978:172) also contends that the way children played games is usually a good indicator of how they are coping with life in general.

4.8 SESSION 1

The goals of the first session was to establish rapport with the six participants ; to reduce their sense of isolation; to help them to identify and recognise different feelings; to explore reasons why parents get divorced and to increase their awareness and acceptance of diverse family structures.

- **Activity: Explore the reasons why parents get divorced.**

Participant 1: Responses to the reason why parents get divorced:

“ They are rude to each other”

“They fight with one another”

“ They throw the stuff on the floor and hit one another”

“They throw their rings away”

“ They take things away from each other e.g. blankets, pots, the broom and the bed”

“They break the window”

Participants 2 : Responses to the reason why parents get divorced:

“ They were fighting”

“ They were swearing”

“ They were fighting with their hands”

“ One of them broke the window. It was my mommy”

“ They left one another”

Participant 3 and participant 4: Responses to the reason why parents get divorced:

“They do not agree with each other”

“They have many arguments”

“They start to dislike each other”

“They raise their voices to each other”

“Things in their lives changed”

“They don’t go out together any more”

“They start to like different things”

“They sleep in different rooms”

Participant 5: -Age 11 Responses to the reason why parents get divorced:

“Because they are uncomfortable with each other”

“They always fight with each other, like shouting”

“My mommy used to throw stuff at my daddy sometimes”

“ My mommy threw hot tea at my daddy”

Participant 6-Age 8

“My mommy said she never used to fight with my daddy, but threw hot oil at him”

“They get angry when they get divorced”

- **Activity: To explore what their coping skills were, participants were asked what they did when all these things were happening.**

Participant 1:

“ I was pulling my sister to take me to my ma who lived upstairs”

“ I went to my cousin”

“ I just cry”

Participant 2

“ I watch television”

“ I worry about them”

“I sit on the bed”

Participant 3:

“Sat with my head in the pillow’

“I was quiet for a while”

“I cried”

Participant 4

“I also cried”

“ I spoke to my brother”

“I wrote in my diary about how I felt”

“I played my guitar”

“ I sometimes spoke to my friends”

“ I worried about what would happen after my parents left each other”

Participant 5

“I always laid under the blankets in my room with my sister, while my sister was crying”

“I always used to play with my toys”

Participant 6

“I was just watching them”

“My mommy threw hot tea at my daddy then it went onto me and my brother”
” I felt better when they stopped fighting.”

- **Activity: Explore the feelings which comes up when they think about their parent’s divorce:**

Participant 1

“ sad; crying; unhappy”

Participant 2:

“ Lonely; worried; cross; frustrated; scared; irritable; sad; furious and mad”

Participant 3

“Sad; worry; scared; panic; lost;

Participant 4

“Disappointed; sad; worried; a little angry; frustrated; I wandered, why me”

Participant 5

“ I am always sad”

“ I feel like crying”

Participant 6

“ I felt sad”

“I cried when the hot tea fell on me and my brother”

4.9 THERAPIST'S REFLECTION

Session 1 highlighted the fact that all participants were affected by the conflict that occurred during their parents' divorce. This supports the view that no age, stage or gender is immune to the effects of parental conflict associated with separation. (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001 in McIntosh, 2003).

The two participants (Kylie and Jade) were in the Early Latency phase (5-8 years) of their development. During this phase children react with huge sadness to their parents' divorce. Feelings of fear, helplessness and insecurity are common (Beekman, 1986) The feelings that participants Rizia and Jordan experienced also concurs with that of child in the Late Latency phase (9-12 years) of development as cited by Beekman (1986). Participants Jack and Jill's responses appeared to be typical of how adolescents would respond. Their responses reflected their capacity to understand the reasons why their parents get divorced. Eleoff (2003) has found that children in the adolescent phase of their development generally have the ability to see integrity in their parents' divorce. In other words they seem to have have a clearer understanding of why parents get divorced. Session 1 also reflects the fact that the secure structure of the family environment is affected by divorce and often children need to become accustomed to a very new family structure and environment. According to Van Wyk & La Cock (1988:24), children of divorce need to adjust to "... a new definition of roles, a new distribution of authority, responsibility, new rules and expectations. This newfound family structure and environment is also accompanied by feelings of uncertainty, insecurity and disorientation for all family members.

4.10 SESSION 2

The aim of session 2 was to help the two participants to grow in their understanding of divorce and divorce related issues. A therapeutic story related to divorce was read and discussed. The questions that were posed were the following:

- What changes have you noticed in the story?
- What changes have you noticed after your parents' divorce?
- How did you feel about the changes?

Participant 1 and 2 responses to “ What changes have you noticed after your parents’ divorce?”

Activity: Changes noticed in relation to mom.

“ We see mom every second weekend”

“ When I went to mommy on Friday I cried because I missed my mommy. My mommy said, “ she is here”

“ Me and my sister were crying on the bed because my mommy was leaving my daddy and then my daddy left my mommy”

“ We stayed with mommy till Sunday”

“ When I went to my mommy on Friday she bought Kentucky Fried Chicken. My dad gave my mommy money for me and my sister’s Kentucky Fried chicken”

“ But it felt better when daddy fetched me”

“ we miss living by her”

“ We know mom loves us”

“ We sad by dad when we miss our mom and sad by mom when we miss our dad”

“ My mommy looked for a husband and found a husband, uncle Tony (pseudonym). His child came to spend weekends with us every second Friday”

Activity: Changes noticed in relation to dad

“ My daddy met aunty Naz (pseudonym)/

“She brought her two children with”

“The baby did not come out yet”

“ It was my daddy and her baby”

Activity: Changes noticed in relation to Stepdad

“ Uncle Tony puts songs on at night”

“ He goes to the shop to buy chips for us”

“ We slept by mom and my mom made chips for us”

Activity: Changes in relation to stepmom

“Then she put off the television and we went to sleep”

“ My mommy took us to ouma”

“ My daddy was not there when aunt Naz put soap in my face.”

“She did it to my sister also but does n’t do it any more”

“ She was nice with us sometimes”

“ She hits me because when she wash our hair she hurts us.”

“Then she puts soap in my face. I say nothing. She did not do this a lot”
I was crying. When she was done she rolled my hair”

Participants’ responses to: How did you feel about the changes?

“ Sad “

“ A little Sad”

“ Feel better sometimes”

Participant 3 and 4

Activity: What changes have you noticed after your parents’ divorce?

Participant 3:

“Dad moved away”

“Spent every second weekend with dad”

“I get a birthday gift from both mom and dad”

Participant 4

“Mom was happier”

“Dad was living alone”

“ More bonding time with dad”

“Dad takes me to hockey every week”

“More open communication with mom”

“Quality time with both parents individually”

“ Dad no longer spends Christmas lunches with us”

Participant 5

Activity: What changes have you noticed after your parents got divorced?

“They never talked to each other much”

“My mom goes out a lot”

“There was no more fighting”

“ Sometimes she still wanted to get back with my dad, because she sent him a message to give her another chance”

“My parents are still trying to be friends”

“ My dad was always friendly after the divorce”

“ He was never rude to my mommy”

“He still helps her when she needs help”

“ If she needs money then he will give her some money”

“ If she has car troubles he will fetch her and take her where she wants to be”

“ When my mommy met someone else, they always used to hug”

Participant 6

‘When they visit each other then they always fight”

4.11 THERAPIST’S REFLECTION

All participants communicated freely and spontaneously during the session. They appeared to feel safe in the therapeutic space that was created. The feelings experienced and reported by participants reflected different degrees of sadness yet also times when they felt better. Winter (2000,p81) cites that intervention is meaningful if it allows for an acceptance of a range of

emotions, individual attention, consistent routines and warmth and gentle dialogue that is reinforced gradually over time.

4.12 SESSION 3

The aim was to write their own story about a child whose parents got divorced highlighting how the child felt and how they felt things would work out. This session further reinforces the goal of growing the participant's understanding of divorce and divorce related issues.

Participant 1's story:

“ I was at hospital. Then I came home. I fell asleep. Then my mommy took me out to N1 City mall. My mommy and daddy felt nice when I was born. My sister picked me up all the time”

“ My mommy was making lunch. She gave me some chicken. My mommy went to go wash me. I went back to sleep. My sister also came to sleep with me. My mommy, sister and my dad went to Welcome, a shop where you can buy food. We bought bread, butter, cheese, cold drinks, a broom a mop and clothes.”

“ My daddy was tickling me a lot. I felt very happy. Then we went inside and my mommy let me sleep in my ma's bed – while they were watching television.”

“My sister was sleeping with me. When we woke up there was a lady who fetched us on Sunday. She was my aunty. We went to church.”

“ My dad got a house and we moved to another house. My dad, me, my sister and my mommy. We lived in Heideveld. We then looked for more stuff and my dad bought some rings for her fingers.”

“ My daddy threw the rings away when she left. Uncle Tony (pseudonym) – stepfather, bought her more rings then the man wanted to take the rings off. He took it. He said that he was going to hit my mommy and then he took the rings. This happened by the centre in Mitchell’s Plain.”

“ My daddy bought me chips and luxuries for me and my sister. I was sitting on the bed watching television. Me, my mommy and sister and dad were there. My daddy went to buy chocolate and sweets. Then I went to sleep again”

“ My mom and dad did skel (argue) with one another, then they took their bags and left. Me and my sister went with my daddy. My daddy met aunty Naz (pseudonym). Aunty Naz was nice to me. She let us all play games She let us ride our bikes. My stepmom slept at the hospital. Me and my sister slept by my dad. The next day they came home and we fetched our brother. Baby was sleeping and I was happy”

Participant 2's Story

"Once upon a time there was a little girl who went through a lot when her parents were fighting. Her name was Sarah. Her mom and dad fought every time.

Then she came in her house and so she saw her daddy saying to her mom "I don't love you any more". Then when her daddy said something the girl said, "stop fighting." When her daddy went out, he went to the police station. So he told the policeman that he doesn't want to live with his wife. Sarah was very angry so she started to cry, then her mommy came to hug her. They later went to court. So they got a divorce".

"Then mommy and daddy went to jail and Sarah went to live with her granny". When it was Sarah's mom's birthday she bought her mom a present. When it was her daddy's birthday, she bought him a big present."

Participant 3's: Story

"It all started one night after I got into bed. They shouted at one another in the dining room saying, " I don't love you anymore, we may as well start sleeping in separate beds too" So, the next day he slept on the couch and a few weeks later he was gone for good.

Mom met someone new, but he was all right. He was really nice to my brother and I and it was fun when we went away on weekends. I still saw dad every week though. He took me to hockey practice every Tuesday and Thursday. Sometimes he took me on Saturdays too. Things were great.

Mom seemed happier and the quality time I spent with dad made it all worthwhile.”

Participant 4's Story

“There was a boy whose parents got divorced.

He thought that he would never see one of his parents again and it would be terrible. When the divorce eventually happened he discovered that it was not really that bad and that he was spending every second weekend with his father.

As the days went by, he slowly started getting used to the idea. What he really enjoyed was the fact that he got two gifts from (each parent) on his birthday and on Christmas day. He realized that things would never be the same. He felt happy because his parents were happier now than they were before the divorce”.

Participant 5's Story

“One day, there was a boy called Jordan. He had a brother and a sister. His parents used to fight all the time. They were always angry with each other. We were not allowed to go to my daddy's family. Sometimes we did and when we came back my mother used to “skel”. She used to say “why are you taking the children out to your family while it is so dark outside. When they used to fight we were always sad and my sister told them to stop fighting. So, they wanted to get a divorce. They went to court and my daddy said we must live with him. We used to visit my mommy every second week. They never used to fight as much. They started to become friends and they never used to

throw stuff at each other any more. After the divorce I was sad and most of the time I used to cry. But then I got used to it. Now, I don't think about it, that much any more".

Participant 6's: Story

"Once upon a time a boy's parents were arguing all the time. Whenever the mommy and dad argue the boy goes to play outside with his toys and with his brother and while they are outside his mother and dad were arguing and then they cried. Then they went inside again, and my daddy said, what is wrong? Then the boy said "nothing". Then I don't know what happened further".

4.13 THERAPIST'S REFLECTION

The therapist's observation of Rizia was that she appeared pensive while drawing pictures of the story, which she had created. The story was divided into an "age" time line- as a way of structuring things for them. They were both very cooperative during the session. After Rizia and Kylie's drawings were completed they did not hesitate to tell their stories which the therapist recorded verbatim. This was done not only due to time constraints but so as not to put any pressure on the participants that may link to the pressure felt within their classrooms. Oaklander (1978:95) cites that children are often reluctant to write because there is often a great emphasis within the classroom on spelling, form and sentence construction which often hampers a child's creativity. According to Oaklander, (1978:85) when children write stories it will generally reflect something about their life situation. The other participants felt

comfortable dictating their stories to the therapist who recorded these verbatim.

4.14 SESSION 4

The goal was to teach 5 steps in problem solving and to practise this within the session. The 5 steps included (i) Identification of the problem; (ii) Generate options or alternatives; (iii) Consider the consequences of the alternatives; (iv) Choose the alternative or option that looks the best; (v) Self-evaluate and reinforcement. These problem-solving steps could apply to different situations or problems, which they encounter in their daily lives. They were encouraged to come up with a list of their own problems. The participants were also asked to generate some options or solutions to these problem scenarios. They were encouraged to select the best option in each scenario, which would not make the problem worse.

The problem scenarios, which the participants created, were the following:

Scenario 1: Dad does not want us to visit aunty Angie.

Option A: "Ask dad if he can take us to aunty Angie some other time to play with our cousins".

Option B "Listen to our dad."

Option C. "Throw a tantrum"

Scenario 2: Our parents scold us.

Option A: "Apologise and say sorry."

Option B: "Sing to our parents"

Option C "Be cross and go to our room"

Scenario 3: Dad does not answer me when I speak to him.

Option A: "Ask our step mommy"

Option B: "Touch him, wait till he looks at us and then ask him the question."

Option C: "Keep quiet."

Scenario 4: We must only play ball in the yard and not in the road.

Option A: "Listen to our parents and play another game"

Option B: "We can play on-on."

Option C: "Not listening to our parents."

Scenario 5: My stepbrother fights with us.

Option A: "Tell dad and our step mommy"

Option B: "We can say sorry to each other"

Option C: "We can fight back"

Participant 3 and 4

Scenario 1: Who comes to school functions

Option A: "Invite both parents"

Option B: "Invite mom only"

Option C: " Don't tell dad at all"

Scenario 2: Parents talk bad about one another

Option A: "Talk to mom and dad about it."

Option B: "Just ignore it."

Option C: "Believe the bad stories."

Scenario 3: Only see dad every second week

Option A: "Argue with mom because you can't see him"

Option B: "Speak to him on the phone"

Option C: "Ask him to say "Hi!", during the week"

Scenario 4: Mom met a new partner

Option A: "Be cross with mom"

Option B: "Find some way to like her partner"

Option C: "Do not judge her partner too soon"

Participant 5 and participant 6

Scenario 1 : My dad does not tell me stories about God any more

Option A: "Talk to him about it"

Option B: "Ignore the problem"

Option C: "Throw a tantrum"

Scenario 2: My mommy sometimes talk mean about him behind his back

Option A: "Tell her to stop talking bad about dad"

Option B: "Go quiet and ignore"

Option C: "Talk to mom about our feelings when she talks bad about dad"

Scenario 3: Seeing my mother every second weekend

Option A: "Be sad and start crying"

Option B: "Phone her now and then"

Option C: "Ask my dad to take me to visit her"

Scenario 4: I don't see my grandparents often.

Option A: "I can ask my mom to take me to visit them"

Option B: "I can phone them and ask them to visit me by my mommy's house"

Option C: "Forget about them"

4.15 THERAPIST'S REFLECTION

The session resumed with the therapist playing a feelings game with the participants, for example "What colour do you feel like today?". All the participants enjoyed the games as it helped them to relax in preparation for the session. They responded well to the steps in problem solving and appeared to understand the importance of choosing the best possible option to their problem scenario. They understood that they needed to choose the best option that would solve their problem, but which would not get them into any trouble.

4.16 SESSION: 5

The goal was to practise and consolidate problem solving steps using different scenarios and to play a game where they pretended to be on a panel of “experts” on divorce related issues. Questions were then posed to them to answer from the perspective of divorce “experts’. They were encouraged to role-play by adopting the name of a celebrity or someone they admired, whilst being a panel member. The purpose was to establish their understanding and internalization of divorce related issues.

Rizia chose to be “ Teacher Peacock”(an educator) on the panel and Kylie chose to be “Alicia Keys”(R & B Singer). Jill chose to be “Oprah” and Jack chose to be “Spiderman”. Jordan played the role of “Tripple H” and Jade chose the role of “Batman”. Participants took turns to answer the questions that were posed:

Question 1:When parents get divorce, is it the children’s fault?

Alicia Keys: “ It is not the child’s fault. It is the parents who are getting divorced”

Oprah (Jill): “No, because it is mom and dad’s issues”

Tripple H: “No, it is not always the children’s fault. The parents might not be comfortable with each other”

Batman: “ No, because their parents fight”

Question 2: What are the kinds of things children worry about when their parents get divorced?

Teacher Peacock: “ You dream about how they fight all the time”

Spiderman (Jack):” Not knowing which parent they will stay with and whether they will see the other parent again”

Tripple H: “They worry about where they will live; they worry about whether they will still see the other parent.”

Batman: “ They worry when their parents fight and when they are rude to each other”

Question 3: What can children do when they are angry with their parents?

Alicia Keys: “They can go sleep or go and play”

Oprah: “Talk to your friends about it or play a sport and stay active to get your mind off it.”

Tripple H: “They can tell their parents why they are angry and their parent might do something about it.”

Batman: “Nothing”

Question 4: When parents start to date, does this mean that they do not love their children in the same way?

Teacher Peacock: “ No, it means that they still love their children even if they are divorced. “They need a special friend in their life.”

Spiderman: “No, because they are hoping to find another parent to help support the kid”

Tripple H: “No they still do love their children because if their parent did not like them then their parent would be mean to them”

Batman: “They do love their children”

Question 5: If children try really hard, can they get their parents back together again?

Alicia Keys: “ No, because when you ask your parents to come back, they will say, No”

Oprah: “They can only hope and pray, but I would not force them to get back together again if I know they will be unhappy”

Tripple H:” It is not impossible but there can still be a way”

Batman: “ Yes, they can. They can say stop arguing and they will say stop fighting and stop being rude to one another”

Question 6: Do you think parents must wait until their children are grown-up before they get a divorce?

Teacher Peacock: “No, they can get divorced when the children are any age”

Spiderman: “No, because the child could have an unhappy childhood growing up with their parents fighting with each other”

Tripple H: “No, because if the parent is uncomfortable, that person must say so to the other parent”.

Batman: “No, because they don’t want to live with each”.

Question 7: Do children whose parents get divorced have more trouble at school?

Alicia Keys: “ Yes, If you tell a friend they will tell others”.

Oprah: “Sometimes, but it all depends how they handle the divorce situation. Maybe, some talk about it and others don’t”.

Tripple H: “It could be because the child will be more focused on their parent’s problems than their work”.

Batman: “No because they are good at school”

Question 8: What are some of the reasons why children do not want their parents to remarry?

Teacher Peacock: “Because they want their parents to be together. Maybe, they are scared parents will love the new mom or new dad more”.

Spiderman: “Because they still love their father and sometimes they don’t want another father figure who takes the place of their father”.

Tripple H: “The one reason could be, that the child is a bit uncomfortable with the new person”.

Batman: “Because then they have to buy all the rings for each other and then they will only have a little money”.

Question 9: When parents get divorced, can the children be just as happy as children whose parents are married?

Alicia Keys and Teacher Peacock: “ Yes”

Oprah and Superman: “Yes, maybe their new partner has children and you can become friends with them. The household will be a much happier place”.

Tripple H: “Yes, because the child can see both parents and spend the same time with each other”.

Batman:” No because then they won’t see their mother or their daddy for a long time”.

4.17 THERAPIST’S REFLECTION

All participants thoroughly enjoyed this activity. They felt empowered during the session. The fictitious names, which they adopted, appeared to have given them the confidence to respond in the manner, which they did, and it was a non-threatening and safe way to participate in the activity. They left the session feeling extremely affirmed. Oaklander (1978:137) contends that play-acting helps children to get closer to themselves. It helps to increase their self-awareness, the imagination and the senses. Drama, she claims, becomes the natural tool to assist and give expression to parts of themselves that are hidden and to build strength and selfhood. In order to participate in this process they use all the resources within themselves e.g. sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, facial expression, body movement, fantasy and intellect. (Oaklander, 1978:139).The participants took their roles quite seriously when they answered the questions.

4.18 SESSION: 6

The goal of this session was to teach them the skill of assertiveness as a way of dealing with their anger, using “I messages”. This involves teaching them to identify the feeling and to clarify why they were feeling that way. An opportunity would be given to them to practise this skill.

The therapist proceeded to teach them how to use “ I Messages” as a way of stating how they personally respond to situations. It would help them to communicate assertively and express their feelings in a non-threatening way. It is an effective technique to use when they are angry. The session started where they firstly explored the different feelings which they experience. The participants generated their own problem scenarios or general scenarios which they used to practise “I feel Messages”

The problem scenarios generated by the participants were as follows:

Participants 1 and 2

“Charneez was rude to me.”

“ Tina did not listen to me when I spoke.”

“Jamie chased me away.”

“Sharneez did not share her sweets with me.”

“ Konan threw me with the ball and stone.”

“ I went to Waheeda birthday party.”

“ Tamzin fights with me.”

“ My friend Sarah walked away from me.”

“ My teacher gave me a gold star.”

“ My daddy said that I cannot visit my mommy this weekend”

“ I play with my friend”

Participants 3 and 4

“Ashleigh was rude about my mother”

“ My friend sometimes disrespects me”

“ Jessica mocks the way I dress”

“ My friend did not invite me to her party”

“ My friend sometimes lies to me”

“Robert shouts at me”

“ When my friend treats me unfairly”

“ When my mom asks me continuously to do the dishes”

Participants 5 and 6

“ My brother take my stuff without permission”

“ My brother is rude to me”

“When my dad takes me to soccer late”

“My friends sometimes call me names.”

“ Brandon in my class irritates me.”

“ The boy in my class stole things from my school bag.”

“My ma tells me to clean the yard all the time”

4.19 THERAPIST'S REFLECTION

Rizia and Kylie entered the session feeling very happy and relaxed. They requested that a game be played because they really loved it. Both participants exuded spontaneity and confidence. Participants were very good at waiting and taking their turns. They demonstrated consideration for each other, listened well to each other during the session. Both participants also reported that they were looking forward to the coming weekend with their dad because they could play games, play with their brothers and go to the shop and buy stuff. Participants 3 and 4 showed a keen interest in the session. Participant 5 was very cooperative and thought things through well before providing a response. Participant 6 tended to have a shorter attention span and thus he needed to be kept on track.

4.20 SESSION: 7

The goal of the session was to help them to identify feelings of anger and what causes it as well as to explore helpful and unhelpful ways of dealing with their anger. Often children of divorced families experience anger when they realize that divorce had been a choice, which has imposed many uncomfortable and stressful changes on them. The therapist will aim to normalize feelings of anger, and will emphasize that it is how they deal with the anger that matters. Furthermore, it was explained that when feelings are expressed, children are less likely to feel very sad or depressed.

The session proceeded with them becoming aware of, and sharing how their bodies felt inside when they are angry:

Rizia and Kylie's Responses:

" I feel very hot "

" My fist pulls tight"

"My face looks cross when I am angry"

We then explored helpful and unhelpful ways of being angry: It was explained that unhelpful ways of being angry would get them into further trouble at school or at home whilst helpful ways of being angry will not get them into trouble but will help them feel better.

Jack and Jill :How my body feels when I am angry:

"I feel very tense."

"I feel as if the anger is bubbling inside of me."

"I feel like punching my wall."

"My body stiff when I am angry."

Jordan and Jade: How my body feels when I am angry

"I feel tense."

"I feel very hot and my ears go red."

"My heart beats faster."

"I start breathing heavily when I am angry."

Participants were encouraged to brainstorm what makes them angry.

Their responses were recorded as follows:

Kylie's Responses:

“It makes me angry when I cannot go to my mommy.”

“It makes me angry when my brother fights with me.”

“ It makes me angry when my teacher yells at me.”

Rizia’s Responses:

“ It makes me angry when my friend does n’t want to play with me.”

“It makes me angry when my friend takes my pencil with asking for permission.”

“It makes me angry when children swear at me.”

Jack

“I get angry when people shout at me.”

“I get angry when they don’t listen to me.”

“I get angry when I get a lot of chores.”

Jill

“It makes me angry when my brother shouts at me.”

“I get angry when people don’t keep their promises.”

“It makes me angry when people judge me before meeting me.”

“I get angry when I can’t solve a problem.”

“I get angry when people are rude about my family and friends.”

Jordan

“It make me angry when somebody tries to pick a fight with me.”

“I get angry when people irritate me.”

“I get angry when people do not listen to me.”

“I get angry when I can’t get something right.”

“I get angry when there is nothing to watch on television.”

Jade

“It makes me angry when people fight with me.”

“I get angry when my brother teases me.”

“I get angry when my sister does not play with me.”

“I get angry when my friends leave me out of their game.”

Participants were then asked to brainstorm unhelpful and helpful ways of being angry with a view to enhance their personal coping skills.

Activity: Unhelpful ways of being angry.

Rizia and Kylie

“Fighting with my brother or friends”

“Telling lies to my parents or teachers”

“Hitting my friends”

“Destroying something”

“Swearing at somebody”

“Not listening to my daddy or my teacher”

“ Keeping quiet and not telling anybody what is wrong”

Jack and Jill

“Fighting with people”

“Shouting at people when I am angry.”

“Letting my emotions take over your actions.”

“Being aggressive when I am angry.”

“Making unrealistic demands on mom.”

“Sitting for hours on my cell phone.”

Jordan and Jade

“Breaking stuff”

“Hurting my brother.”

“I bump my head against the wall.”

“Strangling somebody.”

“Eating a lot of food when I am angry.”

Activity: Helpful ways of being angry:

Rizia and Kylie

“Reading a book when I am angry”

“Writing a letter to a friend in my book”

“ Tearing up a newspaper”

“Throwing a ball at an angry face”

“ Playing with my dog at home”

“ Using “I messages” when I am angry”

“ Going to my room for little while”

Jack and Jill

“Talking to somebody about how you feel.”

“Going for a run.”

“Breathing to stay calm.”

“Doing exercises when I am angry.”

“Surrounding myself with positive people.”

“Write in my journal about how I feel.”

“Play my guitar when I am angry”

“Pampering myself e.g having a calming relaxing bath.”

Jordan and Jade

“Talking to my friends.”

“Talking to my daddy.”

“Doing yoga to relax my body.”

“Playing the sport I love.”

“Write an angry letter and throw it away.”

“Drawing relaxes me.”

“When I play with my friends.”

4.21 THERAPIST’S REFLECTION

Kylie and Rizia participated willingly and spoke spontaneously during the session and they were reminded that this was the final session. Both girls were encouraged to practise the skills which they had learnt, in their everyday

lives. They were happy to be there and enjoyed the one- on- one attention received in these small group sessions. It was noted that they left the session feeling rather confident and self-assured.

Jack and Jill were prepared in advance about the final session. Participations were relaxed and they enjoyed being part of the therapeutic sessions. Jordan and Jade participated enthusiastically and felt a slightly sad that it was the last session as they enjoyed the individual attention received during the sessions. They were reminded to practise the skills that they had learnt during the sessions.

4.22 POST THERAPY FOLLOW-UP

One month after intervention had taken place, interviews were held with participants' classroom educators as well as their custodial parent, with a view to establishing how they are adjusting after the intervention process.

4.23 RIZIA AND KYLIE

4.23.1 Report by custodial parent

The biological father was an introvert by nature and did not provide an in depth account of the girls' post intervention adjustment. However, he reported as follows:

He felt that Rizia was still rather quiet at home. She sleeps well and is doing fine emotionally and psychologically. He reported that he remains concerned about her academic progress at school. He will be communicating with Rizia's educator on a regular basis about her academic performance.

The biological father reported that Kylie was coping fairly well academically. He was not concerned about her performance. She is also doing well in terms of social and emotional aspects. He described the older one as being “quite alright”

4.23.2 Report by Rizia and Kylie’s educators

Rizia’s educator reported on her progress as follows: She reported that academically Rizia is a little weak but she is very eager to learn. Rizia receives remedial intervention at school level and she also gets extra assistance after school. Rizia is not shy to ask her educator for extra work. Thus, generally her educator felt that she is able to work with Rizia. Socially, she is described as having many friends in class. When she observes Rizia after school hours she always presents as being very happy. Emotionally, her educator reported that there are no concerns in this area. She is fine in class. Her educator reported that she was initially very quiet in class but this changed. Rizia’s educator also reported that she had met with her stepmother who reportedly gave an account of Rizia, which was contrary, to how she experiences Rizia at school. Her stepmother claims that she swears at home which her educator found very hard to believe.

Kylie’s educator reported that she provides her with individual attention in class. She also supports her after school whenever she is able to. Socially, Kylie is described as being well adapted and has many friends at school. Kylie was described by her educator as being emotionally stable. She often allocates her with certain responsibilities within the class, which she enjoys

very much. Kylie is described as being even-tempered and not temperamental. She is a sensitive little girl but her educator reported that she understands what Kylie needs and she supports her as far as possible.

4.24 JACK AND JILL

4.24.1 Report by the custodial parent

Jack and Jill's parent reported that she had noticed a change in Jack in particular. He appeared to be more assertive in his attitude and in his approach towards her. She mentioned that he has undergone such a growth spurt, both physically and emotionally, which might be attributed to the adolescent stage of development.

Jill appeared to be growing in many ways but especially emotionally. She appears to be used as support for her non-custodial parent. She has always been a responsible child seeking to please both her parents. It is important to her not to let her parents down.

4.24.2 Report by Jack and Jill's educators

It was reported that Jill continues to demonstrate exemplary behaviour. She sets a very good example for her peers to follow. She is dedicated to her schoolwork and she is loyal to her friends.

Jack's behaviour was not much different except that he appears to be more settled in his schoolwork. He appears to be putting more effort into his work.

His educator still feels that he is capable of doing much better. He always gets along well with his peers with whom he enjoys spending time.

4.25 JORDAN AND JADE

4.25.1 Report by custodial parent

Their parent reported that he aims to create stability for his boys. He is responsive to their needs and he spends quality time with them. He reported that they seem to understand that he will never be in a relationship with their mother again. Jade has not changed much except for being more focused on his schoolwork. He reportedly does not remember much about how verbally aggressive and emotionally erratic his mother was in the marriage.

Jordan still bites his nails when he seems upset about things. He seems to do a lot of thinking and would sometimes ask questions with regard to his mother. His mother has entered into a second relationship where she is cohabiting with her partner. Their relationship is sometimes characterised by physical abuse from which he would like to protect his children.

4.25.2 Report by Jordan and Jade's educators

Jordan is doing very well at school. He quietly gets on with the tasks at hand. He gets along well with his friends and loves to participate in sport. He has been selected to be a prefect at school.

Jade's academic performance is improving since he is repeating his grade one-year. He has many friends but can get into fights when he is provoked by

others. However, it is felt that he can be controlled and he can be a very sweet boy.

4.26 THERAPIST'S REFLECTION

It should be noted that the participants' non-custodial parents were not part of this study, which could be considered to be one of the limitations of this study. However, due to time constraints as well as the researcher's own responsibility towards the circuit (i.e. rendering psycho-educational support services to 38 schools), a comprehensive approach was not possible.

4.27 DATA ANALYSIS

The themes that emerged for all the participants during the therapy sessions were as follows:

Theme: Family Dynamics: Pre-Divorce

- Conflict between biological parents.
- Verbal abuse between parents.
- Physical abuse between parents.

Theme: Family Dynamics: Post Divorce

- Adapting to changes after the divorce:
- Visitation to non-custodial parent every fortnight.
- Re-marriages of both parents.
- Moving home.
- Parent – child relationship
- Step-sibling relationships

- Child-step parent relationship.

Theme: Emotions experienced

- Sadness
- Crying
- Worry
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Irritability
- Mad
- Furious
- Ambivalence(Happy/Sad)

Theme: Academic support at school

- Four participants received additional assistance from their educators.

Theme: Social Adjustment

- They have many friends and are well adapted.

Theme: Emotional adjustment

- No problems in this area.
- Emotional stability.

The abovementioned themes were identified during the process of this research study. The information obtained were the result of all the therapeutic sessions conducted with the participants. Data was collected by means of

observations, verbatim reports by both participants, detailed field notes. After data was collected the researcher attempted to identify patterns of behaviour, themes and experiences. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2002: 339) contends that data analysis is a way in which one organises and gives meaning to a body of data that had been collected. The themes that were identified are seen as “umbrella constructs” before, after and during the data collection process (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005 : 211).

4.28 SUMMARY

This chapter highlights clearly highlights all seven sessions conducted by the researcher, which formed part of the support programme for the two participants. The goals for each session were defined and a report was provided on each session. Sessions were concluded with brief reflections made by the researcher. This chapter also contains the results of the interviews held with educators as well as the custodial parents. Themes that emerged during this empirical study were the following: family dynamics pre-divorce, family dynamics post-divorce, emotions, social support and overall functioning.

CHAPTER 5 –

CONCLUSION

5. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to explore the various issues that children experience when their parents get divorced. It was the researcher's goal to establish whether the impact of the divorce was different for children in different developmental phases of their lives. The researcher has included six learners in the study. These were learners from families where their parents were divorced. Two learners were in their early latency phase of development (aged 5-8 years), two were in the late latency phase of development (aged 9-12 years) and two were in the adolescent stage. The learners were seen in pairs as they were siblings from the same family unit. They were seen over a period of 7 weekly therapeutic sessions.

In this concluding chapter the process of therapy will be discussed for both participants, including the therapist's reflections. The limitations of the study will be highlighted and recommendations will be made regarding future research.

5.1 SESSION 1

The goal for this session was to establish rapport with the participants with a view to making them feel relaxed and to make them feel less isolated. Different feelings were recognised and explored. Richard's & Bates (1997:442), cited that the act of sharing fears and feelings is a way of

overcoming stress. This would in essence provide them with a sense of control. The participants were also encouraged to discuss reasons why parents get divorced, to increase their understanding and awareness of divorce and to accept that there are diverse family structures. Session 1 highlighted the point that both participants were affected by the conflict of their parents' divorce. It became apparent that irrespective of age or stage of development, no child remains unscathed or affected by their parent's divorce. The psychological well-being of children are directly affected by the nature of the relationship between the significant adults in their lives, or the relationships within the family (Van Wyk and La Cock, 1988:23), Thus, whether parents remain together for the sake of the children or whether they separate or divorce, the quality of the relationships between the adults plays a paramount role in the psychological and emotional well being of children. However, either way, it should be acknowledged, that divorce does have adverse effects on children and it has painful consequences for them (Van Wyk, 1988:23). Van Wyk & la Cock(1988:26), furthermore state a paradox, that is, it is not the divorce per se that is harmful to children, but rather the manner in which parents handle their divorce.

5.2 SESSION 2

Session two was aimed at increasing the participants' understanding of divorce and the issues that accompany it. In this session the post divorce difficulties that participants were dealing with were manifested. For example, issues related to fortnightly visitation, introduction of stepsiblings including the arrival of a new sibling, the relationship with step parents as well the

participants' feelings about these changes. This session links to the general therapeutic goals, which were set out for the therapeutic intervention.

5.3 SESSION 3

In this session participants were encouraged to write their own stories of a child whose parents got divorced which was aimed at further enhancing their understanding of divorce and the related issues. Children's stories are often a projection of their own lives according to Oaklander(1978:85). Furthermore, when asking children to engage in story telling, it does not matter whether one uses ideas from movies or books, because children invariably choose what appeals to them and they always change stories to include their version.

5.4 SESSION 4

This session focused on teaching participants the 5 steps to problem solving. This was done with a view to capacitate them. All participants responded well during this session and did not experience any difficulties generating problem scenarios. They were also encouraged to practise these problem-solving steps at home as well as at school so as to consolidate the steps. Practising the steps allows them to generalize the steps to different areas of their lives. Johnston & Campbell (1988:177), cite that cognitive mastery sometimes helps children develop emotional mastery and coping. Richards & Bates (1997:442), also alluded to the fact that a sense of mastery or control results in improved self-esteem.

5.5 SESSION 5

The aim of this session was to consolidate the problem-solving skills that were taught in the previous session. Games were played with the participants. The purpose of this activity was twofold. The first being that it was meant to be fun and secondly, the therapist was able to establish their sense of understanding of - and internalization of divorce -related issues. Based on the therapist's clinical judgement of the level of fun the participants had with this activity, as well as their verbal responses, it appeared as if the session's goals were reached. It is further hoped that the growth and understanding observed in the participants would transfer into their everyday lives.

5.6 SESSION 6

The aim of this session was to teach the participants the skill of being assertive using "I messages" as a way of dealing with anger as it emerges in their daily lives. They were provided with an opportunity to practise the skill of assertiveness during the session. The participants also felt empowered when they were encouraged to generate their own list of problem scenarios with a view to making this process feel real to them. The therapist noted that all participants felt increasingly relaxed, spontaneous and confident. They demonstrated consideration towards each other and were supportive of each other. There was an eagerness to assist each other when necessary. Participants left the sessions with a great sense of contentment and were keen to spend time with their respective families.

5.7 SESSION 7

This session served as an extension of session 6 where participants were encouraged to identify how their bodies felt when they were angry as a way to promote self-awareness as well as to raise their consciousness of what makes them angry. This was followed by a facilitation process by the therapist, which helped them to identify helpful ways and unhelpful ways of being angry. Feelings that were expressed by participants were normalised and an emphasis was placed on the importance of dealing with their anger in an appropriate manner.

5.8 FINDINGS WITH REFERENCE TO STUDY AIMS

5.8.1 The issues that children experience when their parents get divorced.

Findings with reference to the researcher's first aim: All the participants were exposed to family fights in different degrees. Verbal fights and abuse (for example, swearing), physical abuse (fighting) and domestic violence. After their parents got divorced the participants had to adjust to the changes in time spent with the non-custodial parent (for example, fortnightly visitation), re-partnering, step-siblings, being disciplined by a step-parent; and post-divorce verbal fights between the parents.

5.8.2 The impact of the divorce on children in various developmental phases

Findings with reference to the researcher's second aim: McIntosh (2003,) has stated that children interpret conflict through their own development lens. Thus the stage in which the child finds himself dictates how he or she will integrate the experience on an emotional level. This study included children from all three stages of development., namely, early latency phase (5-8 years),the late latency phase (9-12 years) and the adolescent phase (13-18 years). The study highlighted the fact that younger children still struggle with the issue of permanency of their parents' divorce (Eleoff,2003). This was demonstrated by participant 6(in session 5) who believed that if his parents just stopped arguing ,fighting and being rude to one another, then they could get back together again. The study also demonstrated (in session 5) that children in the adolescent phase of development have the capacity to understand the merits of why divorces happen as well as appreciate the peaceful post-divorce atmosphere as well as happy parents.

5.8.3 How children can be helped to deal with their parents' divorce.

Findings with reference to the researcher's third aim: Miller, et al (1999) stresses the important role of the school in helping children deal with their parents' divorce. It would be helpful if educators demonstrated the necessary understanding and sensitivity towards children whose parents have divorced. It would be helpful if they are able to create a supportive environment within

which children feel free to communicate as well as develop the necessary coping skills. Furthermore, it would also be helpful if parents equipped themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with their divorce. This would enable them to provide the appropriate guidance and support to their children during the divorce process. Johnston and Campbell (1988) stressed that it would also be helpful if children are kept informed about issues that would impact on them directly, as this would allay any real or imagined fears that they may experience.

5.8.4 The protective factors that would help children cope more effectively

Findings with reference to the researcher's fourth aim: Researchers have found several factors that would protect children from the potentially harmful effects of their parents' divorce:

- Parents who are able to resolve their conflict amiably, or who are able to keep conflict to a minimum, can contribute positively to their children's post divorce adjustment. Competent custodial parents can also be a good predictor of children's psychological adjustment after the divorce.
- Children can also be buffered against the harmful impact of divorce if the non-custodial parent also implements appropriate parenting skills.
- Parents are encouraged to avoid criticising their ex-partners in the presence of their children if they aim to enhance post-divorce adjustment in their children.

- Children will also flourish in structured environments that are calm, positive and happy and predictable with regard to the application and setting of rules.
- All children need personal space which needs to be respected, especially after the family relocates after the divorce. They can be encouraged to personalise their rooms with favourite toys or ornaments as this will contribute to their feelings of comfort and security.

5.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to six case studies that were based at two schools in Cape Town, for example, one primary school and one high school. Whilst learners fell within the different development phases, namely, the early latency phase (5-8 years) the late latency phase (9-12 years) of development and the adolescent phase of development, the size of the sample per phase was very small. Generalisations therefore cannot be made to the entire population. The study included participants from just one cultural grouping in South Africa and thus the findings cannot be generalised to various population groups. There was only one researcher in this study, and whilst there were attempts at objectivity, it is not known to what extent researcher bias and subjectivity may have influenced the findings of this study. The researcher did not include the non-custodial parents and step-parents in the study. Their contributions could have been valuable and may have provided different insights.

5.10 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the empirical study the following recommendations can be made:

- A next study should focus on participants from diverse cultural groupings of South Africa. It may be advisable to increase the sample size, which would facilitate better generalisation of the findings to the entire population.
- Follow-up sessions with participants are recommended with a view to establishing their level of adjustment and whether or not any changes in their behaviour were sustained.
- It would also be useful to see both parents for example, the custodial as well as the non-custodial parents including their new spouses or partners so as to discuss their children's post divorce adjustment and to provide them with appropriate and useful guidelines to better support their children. It may therefore be helpful to see all the parents for follow-up sessions.
- Educational psychologists have a crucial role to play in South Africa, since the divorce rate is among the three highest in the world (Hickson and Kriegler, 1991). Whilst this study alludes to the important role that parents play in the lives of their children after the divorce, it does not address the impact that the emotionally unstable parent may have on

the adjustment of their children. Perhaps this is an area that could be further explored in a future longitudinal study.

- The role of educators should not be underestimated as they are in an ideal position to make a difference in the lives of the children that they teach. The role of educators in my opinion is not only to teach, but also to really understand each child as a unique and multi-faceted individual in order to respond to each learner individually.

5.11 CONCLUSION

In this study the researcher attempted to offer an intervention with children whose parents have been through a divorce - in order for them to deal with the emotional effects of the trauma that divorces often create. The nature of the support that was offered was short-term therapeutic intervention, which seemed feasible, given the researcher's personal workload.

It should be noted that the researcher is under no illusion that the interventions were necessarily adequate or may have had the desired impact. Winter (2000:82) has cited that children may not always mirror what they have internalised, and what they have internalized does not remain constant. However, the researcher aims to maintain close links with the school to monitor the adjustment and progress of the six learners. The work of the Educational psychologist employed by the Western Cape Education Department often does not allow for long term therapeutic intervention. In

fact, the latter is considered to be a luxury, given the large number of schools that are allocated to psychologists.

This study highlights the very crucial role that educational psychologists employed by the education department can play in the lives of children who experienced the trauma of their parents divorce. They have a direct link with the schools that they service. The school in turn is the place where children not only spend much of their time, but is also a place where continuity and routine can offer a safe environment for interventions. The number of children in the school provides the possibility for group interventions, which may be the ideal way of working if the effects or impact of educational psychology within the school context, is to be felt. Group interventions are cost effective in that, more learners are allowed the opportunity to receive the necessary therapeutic intervention and it also offers multiple benefits.

The impact that educators as well as the school environment may have on school- aged participants should not be underestimated. A warm, friendly and supportive school environment may not only contribute to the success of any therapeutic programme but will also enhance the psycho-social and emotional well-being of all participants.

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V.A. Wagner
41 Sandown Drive
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03 July 2008

The Chief Education Specialist: Mr. E.Hassen
Education Management and
Development Centre (EMDC) - Central
Mowbray
7700

Dear Sir

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MY RESEARCH WITH
LEARNERS WHOSE PARENTS HAVE DIVORCED IN EMDC-CENTRAL**

Permission is hereby requested to conduct my research in schools within the catchment area of the Central Education District. I will be conducting my research in schools within the Kensington area.

The proposed research is intended to contribute to the understanding of the impact that divorce have on school going children in different developmental phases. It also aims to highlight factors that will contribute to the adjustment of these learners. This will be followed by short - term therapeutic intervention with the learners who have been identified.

The topic of my thesis is as follows, "Behaviour Symptomatology and an intervention approach with children of divorce in a school setting.

I believe this information will add value to the work that I do, and will be helpful in the treatment and prevention of emotional disorders.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Faithfully

Vanessa Ann Wagner (Ms)
(Intern Educational Psychologist)

Addendum E

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

Interview with the biological father of participants 1 and 2

How long ago did you get divorce?

“We got divorced in 2004”

Who has custody of the children?

“I have custody of the children since 2006. My ex-wife agreed that I get custody of them due to her depression.”

Describe the domestic circumstances prior to the divorce.

“There was a lot of conflict between my wife and I”

What are your concerns about your children?

“Well, I was called in by my youngest daughter’s teacher who said she was concerned that my daughter was always tired in class. She is also weak scholastically. Her teacher spoke to me about this.”

“My older daughter is the stronger one, and she is coping fine”

Tell me about the visitation rights?

“I drop my daughters off every second weekend. I drop them on a Friday and fetch them on the Sunday”

Have you or your ex-spouse entered into any relationships after your divorce?

“I have remarried soon after the divorce. I think a bit too soon but I needed the support”

What are the challenges with regard to managing your children's behaviour after the divorce?

“Communication between my current wife and I is important. I am finding it very difficult to discipline them and sometimes even avoid disciplining them to avoid conflict between my second wife and I. We don't agree on how to discipline the children. She tends to be a bit harsh with them. The issue of fairness is a concern in how we discipline the children because she also has two children from her previous marriage.”

Addendum E

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

Interview with the biological mother of participants 3 and 4

How long ago did you get divorce?

“The divorce was finalised in March 2006”

Who has custody of the children?

“I have sole custody of my children. My ex-husband felt that they would be better cared for by me.”

Describe the domestic circumstances prior to the divorce.

“Prior to the actual divorce the atmosphere at home was very tense. We had many arguments and I was worried about the impact that this would have on children. We tried not to argue in their presence, but they were very much aware that we were fighting.”

What are your concerns about your children?

“I am concerned about how the divorce might have affected my children. I think it would be a good idea if you worked with them. I welcome any help that they can get at school”

Tell me about the visitation rights?

“Since the divorce the children have seen their father every second weekend. When he got settled with accommodation they started spending weekends every fortnight. There have not been any deviations to this arrangement and the children have grown accustomed to it. There are no problems in terms of visitation rights”

Have you or you ex-spouse entered into any relationships after your divorce?

“As far as I am aware my ex-husband is not in another relationship. He spends quality time with the children and he is consistent in the way he deals with them and has never missed spending any time with the children.”

“I am currently in a relationship with someone who also has children of his own. I introduced him to the children once I was certain that I would be spending more time with him and that he would be the “right” person to have in my children’s life”

What are your challenges with regard to managing your children’s behaviour after the divorce?

“I understand that the divorce must have impacted on them in some way. I try to keep communication channels open with them. So when they are feeling down I try to support them emotionally. My goal is to keep things as stable for them as possible.”

Addendum E

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

Interview with the biological father of participants 5 and 6

How long ago did you get divorce?

“I got divorced in August 2006.

Who has custody of the children?

“I have custody of my kids. I felt that I was the better parent and was able to bring out the best in them”

Describe the domestic circumstances prior to the divorce.

“The lack of communication and tension in the home was not good for the kids. The marriage was over long before the divorce went through. Once we agreed to get divorced the atmosphere in the home was relaxed”

What are your concerns about your children?

“I struggled a bit with my older son, to get him adjusted because he missed his friends and our old home. My goal with my younger son was to keep him in a homely and comfortable environment.”

Tell me about the visitation rights?

“Initially, the visitation was not structured as it should have been. I allowed the children’s mother to gain access to the children at any given time with prior arrangement being made, with the view that the kids needed her maternal

influence. But, I soon realized that this created more conflict especially when she starting visiting without informing me about it.” “I then started implementing a more structured visitation arrangement, for the past two years, as was agreed upon in the conditions of divorce, by allowing visitation every fortnight”

Have you or you ex-spouse entered into any relationships after your divorce?

“I met someone a year after I got divorced. I am very happy in this relationship and so are my kids. My partner is very accepting of my kids.”

“My ex-wife has been in several relationships since the divorce, and most of them were abusive relationships with her partners. She is currently seeing someone who is living with her. I have been told that he drinks and sometimes argues with her”

What are your challenges with regard to managing your children’s behaviour after the divorce?

“I try to manage my kids by keeping them confident and motivating them to deliver their best. I encourage them to be honest about their feelings, aspirations, fears and concerns. I encourage them to talk to me at any given time when the need arises.