

Session 1 Outline

Understanding Divorce and Separation

Introduction

- + Introduce self and group
- + Group Rules sign

Icebreaker activity

What is a family?

- + Definition of families
- + Different kinds of families
- + Television families
- + Different is okay

What is divorce?

- + Meaning of divorce—Handout 1.1 or 1.2
- + Discuss answers and clarify
- + What divorce means and does not mean

Clarifying misconceptions about divorce

- + The Truth about Divorce Game—Handout 1.3
- + Answer common questions about divorce or separation

Deep breathing relaxation technique

- + Teach basic steps—Topic Card 1.1
- + Practice deep breathing

Session wrap-up

Handouts

1.1 What Does Divorce Mean? (written response)

1.2 What Does Divorce Mean? (drawn response)

1.3 The Truth about Divorce Game

Topic Card

1.1 Basic Steps for Deep Breathing

Session 1: Understanding Divorce and Separation

Session Goals: Introductions to the group

- + **Help the participants understand:**
 - * What is a family?
 - * What is divorce?
 - * What does divorce mean for them, their family, and the future?
- + **Clarify confusing aspects and misconceptions of divorce**
- + **Answer common questions about divorce**
- + **Develop skills in the deep breathing relaxation technique**

Materials:

- Poster board/dry erase board
- Markers
- Writing utensils
- Group Rules sign
- True/False signs
- Handouts 1.1 or 1.2 and 1.3
- Topic Card 1.1
- Parent handout
- Kid First Questionnaire (Appendix D)

Introduction

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



“Hello everyone, my name is _____. Let’s talk about why we are all here today. Many kids, just like you, have parents that are going through a divorce or separation, or have already gotten a divorce. You are here today so we can talk about what divorce and separation means for you and your family and what you can do to help with problems you might have because of your parents’ divorce or separation. We are going to meet as a group several times to talk about divorce and separation. Today, we are going to talk about what divorce and separation means, what some divorce words mean, what is going to happen to you and your family, answer some questions you have about divorce and separation, and practice a relaxation skill.”

Note: Next, list the rules for the group on a piece of poster board or dry erase board and place in the room where the participants can see them as a visual reminder when completed. A **Group Rules** sign is also provided in Appendix A. Suggested rules for the group are shown below, but other group rules may also be established.

Group Rules sign



“Now that we know why we are here, let’s go over some rules for the group.

I will write down the rules so everyone can remember them. The first rule is to be kind to everyone in the group. Being kind to everyone is important so no one’s feelings get hurt. The second rule is to listen when other people in the group are talking. We need to listen to others so that we can hear what they are saying. We are going to be talking to each other about different things in the group, so the third and last rule is to not talk to other people outside of the group about what others in the group say. You can talk to others about what you say in the group, but not about what other kids in the group say.”



“What are the three rules again?”

Group Rules

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

Session 1

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

129

Note: Have the participants repeat all of the rules and help or clarify if there is any confusion, then display the rules poster or board somewhere in the room for them to see. Next administer the Kid First Questionnaire (see Appendix D) to get a pretest score for each group member to determine their level of adaptive attitudes towards their parents’ divorce or separation before program implementation.

Icebreaker activity

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



“Let’s go around the room, and you can share your names with the group and tell everyone a few things you like to do for fun so we can all get to know each other a little better.

I will start. Again, my name is _____ and I like to _____.”

What is a family?



“Family can mean different things to different kids. Family can be the people you have lived with and people who are related to you.”



“What is a family?”

Note: Go around the group and have the participants share what family means to them. Then, have the group discuss different types of families.



“There are many different kinds of families that can do different things together. The people in your family can spend time together doing a lot of different things like playing games or eating meals together. Family can include people like brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, moms, or dads. Family can also include step-brothers and sisters, step-moms and dads, and half brothers and sisters. Some families have a mom and a dad, but some other families have two moms or two dads. Other families also might have grandparents or cousins who live with them. There are a lot of examples of different families on TV shows. Let’s see how many TV families the group can think of to share.”

Note: Have the group name several television families. Allow for answers in between each of the following discussion questions. Provide an example of a relevant TV family if the group is struggling to come up with examples.



“Are all of these families different or the same? How are these families different or the same?”



“Some families can look the same, but a lot of families can look very different. The T.V. families that you all came up with are all a little different from each other and that is okay. Having families that are different is not something to feel bad about. Now that your parents are divorced or separated, your family might look a little different, but it is okay because you are not the only one whose parents are divorced. Also, kids that have parents who are still together have families that are different than everyone else’s families. No matter if your parents are divorced or not, all families can look different, include different people, and can do different things. No one’s family is better than any other family—they are just different and that is okay.”



“Does anyone have any other questions about families?”

Note: Answer any general questions the group may have about families being similar or different, and then move on to the next section.



“Divorce is when your parents are not married anymore. They will not be living at the same house with each other and you will spend time with them one at a time. Divorce can also mean that you might live with just one parent most of the time and visit the other parent sometimes. Divorce does not always mean that you will never see one parent ever again. Divorce means that your family will not be together most of the time, but they are still your family. It means that things are going to change but you will be okay and your parents will still be your parents. Divorce does not mean that your parents do not love you or that you did anything wrong. Also, divorce does not mean that your parents will live in separate places for awhile and then move back in together. Most of the time parents stay divorced and will not live together again.”

Note: Check to make sure that the participants understand what divorce is and what divorce is not at the end of this section and answer any questions they still may have. Also, clarify to the group that the circumstances may be different if their parents are still only separated. Explain that separation does not always lead to divorce.

Clarifying misconceptions about divorce

Note: The last section of this session will cover topics that children are often confused or uninformed about regarding the divorce process. Begin this section with playing the *Truth About Divorce Game*. Place the provided **True** sign on one side of the room where the participants can stand if they think the statements you read are true and the **False** sign on the other side if they think a statement is false.



“The last thing we are going to talk about today is some other things about divorce that you might still be confused about or not understand. So now, we are going to play the Truth about Divorce Game!”



Note: Have the participants get into one group in the middle of the room. Point to or show them the two sides of the room they can stand at to answer. Read each statement from **Handout 1.3** to them and have them stand at the “True” side of the room if they think the statement is true or stand at the “False” side of the room if they think it is false.



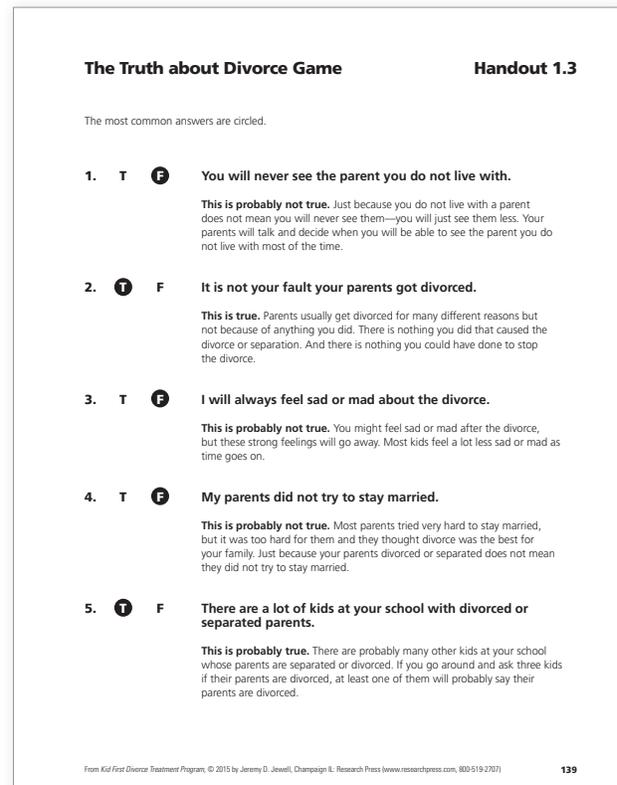
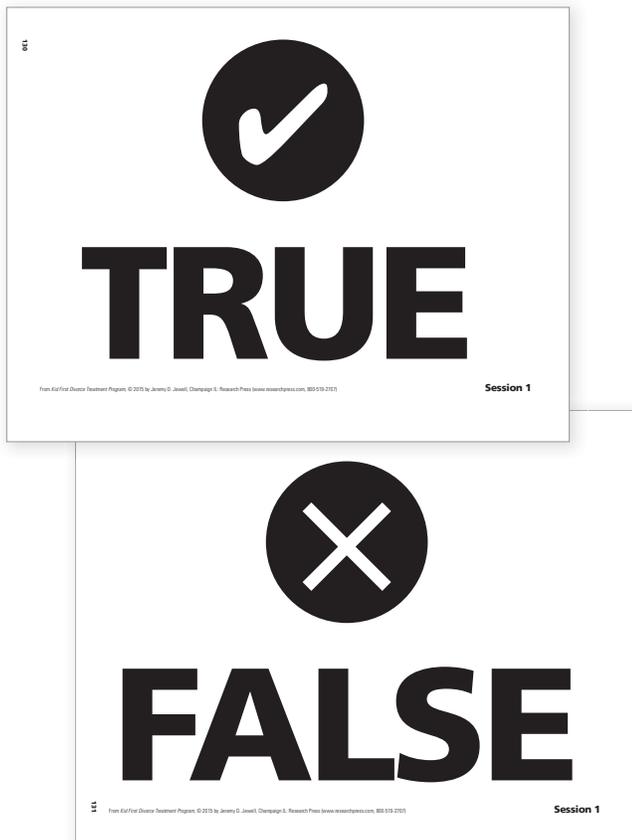
“I am going to read you some statements about divorce. If you think what I say is true, go and stand at the ‘True’ side of the room. If you think what I say is false, go and stand at the ‘False’ side of the room. Ready?”

Note: Have the participants take turns reframing the false statements in ways that would make them true. Also, provide a rationale for why each statement is mostly true or false. For every false statement, the group will be asked the following discussion question.



“How can we change the statement to make it true?”

The Truth about Divorce Game (Handout 1.3)



“We just went over some things about divorce that are usually true or false. What other questions do you have about separation or divorce?”

Note: Answer any questions to the best of your ability that the participants may have regarding the material or any new questions that may come up during the session. Questions may include “Do my parents still love me?” or “Are we ever going to be a family again?”

Deep breathing relaxation technique

Note: End the session by introducing the deep breathing relaxation technique. This technique will help the participants cope with possible distressing feelings that may have come up during the session. Practicing the technique with the participants will also help you become more skilled in this technique and be able to assist the group. Refer to **Topic Card 1.1** when addressing the group.

Basic Steps for Deep Breathing (Topic Card 1.1)

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

Topic Card 1.1

Basic Steps for Deep Breathing

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

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

119



“We are going to learn a relaxation technique called deep breathing. Deep breathing will help you relax and feel better if you start to feel mad or sad about your parents’ divorce or separation. You will feel better if you can learn to help your body relax when you are sad or mad. You can all learn to do deep breathing and can do it at any time and anywhere. Remember, you can do deep breathing when you are feeling mad or upset in any situation. It does not have to be about your parents’ divorce or separation for you to use this skill. First, think of a word that makes you feel happy and calm. Thinking about a happy and calm word can help you to relax and make your mind and body quiet. Some words could be *mom*, *dad*, *calm*, or *love*. Once you know your word, practice saying it over and over in your head and just think about your word. Every time you breathe in and out, think about your word. Let’s practice as a group saying your happy or calm word.”



“What is your happy or calming word?”

Note: Have each group member share their word. Then have the group practice saying their word out loud five times as they are breathing. Prepare the room to have the participants sit or lie down in a comfortable position.

Deep breathing



“First, let’s find a comfy place to sit or lie down. Put your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your stomach. Remember, when you do deep breathing, you should breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth. Pretend like a balloon is filling up in your belly. The hand on your stomach should go up when you breathe in, more than the hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should go down when you breathe out. Try taking a big, slow breath to make the hand on your stomach go up. Now you are ready to do deep breathing.”

Note: Check to see that the participants are correctly doing the technique. Take time to assist anyone that is struggling with the technique. Remember to use a soft, slow, and calming voice when proceeding with the next steps of deep breathing.



“Try to relax and put your hands down by your sides. Close your eyes and try not to think about anything except your happy or calming word. Remember, your stomach should go up when you breathe in. Every time I say “in,” I want you to breathe in through your nose. Every time I say “out,” I want you to breathe out really slowly through your mouth. Remember to think of your happy or calming word. Let’s start now. In (breathe in)...out (breathe out), in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out, in...out. Now, keep breathing and keep your eyes closed. You are feeling very relaxed. Your feet and legs are getting warmer and heavier, and this feeling is moving up your body. Now your arms are getting warm and heavy. The relaxing feeling goes through your arms and down to your fingertips. Now let that warm feeling go up your arms and to your shoulders and head. You feel very relaxed. Let all of your mad or sad feelings leave your body until you feel completely relaxed. Take a few more deep breaths in...and out...one more time, in...and out. You can open your eyes now. This is the end of deep breathing.”



“How do you feel after doing deep breathing?”

Note: Have each group member compare and contrast how they felt before and after the deep breathing technique.

Session wrap-up



“Today we talked about what a family is and how families can look different. We learned what divorce is, what it means for you and your family, and some things about divorce that are usually true or not true. We also learned to do deep breathing to help us relax when we are sad or mad. Remember to try and use deep breathing when you want to relax this week—and you can practice it any time and anywhere. The next time we see each other we will talk about different reasons parents get divorced or separated, who you will live with, and what things will be different after the divorce.”

Note: Thank the children for coming and participating and make sure they know when you will meet next. Have them take the Session 1 handouts with them to keep. Also provide the Session 1 parent handout for them to take home.