



Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

Limiting the Destructive Effects of Divorce on Families

by Susan Napolitano, Ph.D.

For many children, the divorce of their parents is more psychologically devastating than the death of a parent. Unlike divorce, the death of a parent usually results in an outpouring of support and sympathy. Although a parent may be lost forever, the memories and images of that parent are cherished and forever treated with respect. Although it is a tremendous and permanent loss, the child has the means to face the loss with the support of the surviving parent, extended family and friends.

For children of divorcing parents, the emotional field couldn't be more different. These grieving children are forced to hear their parents berate each other and tell stories of the other parent's shortcomings. Children of divorce are often put in the middle and pressured to pick one parent over the other. These children see relatives and friends support one parent while treating the

other as an enemy. Children often cringe at the thought of both parents attending a sporting event for fear that they will make a scene. Divorce not only splits the immediate family, but the division of the extended family widens as the years go by.

Therapists, lawyers and other professionals acting independently rarely solve the problems facing divorcing families because the system is designed to be adversarial. The problem is not with either the therapists or the lawyers as they are both trying to fulfill the role for which they have been chosen. The problem is that the different professionals are working at cross purposes, which often intensifies the conflicts.

The courts and laws alone are too remote or generalized to effectively address the individual needs of children and families in crisis. Too many parents think that once they get their day in court, everything will be resolved. This rarely occurs. After a brief court appearance, a judge who has never met with either of the parties or the

children will make a decision that will affect them for the rest of their lives. The result is rarely satisfying and often leaves a bitterness and resentment that drains the family for years to come. In a system where everyone fights to win, the result is usually that everyone loses.

Collaborative Practice (CP)



minimizes the many destructive forces that jeopardize the emotional health of children and their parents. Rather than winning at all costs, the constructive energy and creative thinking of a team of trained collaborative professionals overrides the destructive emotional and behavioral

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patterns that likely caused the end of the marriage in the first place. The team approach also prevents a divorce battle that can drain bank accounts, harm children and demoralize parents. In the article on the following page, more detail about Collaborative Practice will be given to address the ways that the potentially destructive results of divorce can be limited.

Collaborative Practice Redefines Winning

by Susan Napolitano, Ph.D

With Collaborative Practice (CP) each client obtains a lawyer with expertise in divorce law and collaborative law. The lawyer will protect the party's interests while guiding the client through the complex legal maze of family law, without ever going to court. Collaborative lawyers work together with both parties to avoid the conflict that drives up legal costs and keeps divorcing couples from ultimate resolution. Lawyers and clients are typically assisted by coaches who are licensed mental health professionals trained to manage and re-direct the many emotional obstacles that interfere with reaching reasonable settlements. Coaches help to calm and clarify emotions of the divorcing parties so lawyers can be free to help the parties resolve the legal issues.

With CP the divorcing couple can be moved from the past patterns and toward a sensible resolution of financial, legal, and child-related matters. The

Collaborative team can carefully craft an agreement that maintains respect between parties, creates a healthy co-parenting arrangement and focuses on the emotional and developmental needs of the children. CP ultimately puts the power where it belongs: with the parents.

As a psychologist working with divorcing families for almost twenty years, I couldn't be happier to be a part of Collaborative Practice. Our community now has a wise, respectful, and creative approach to divorce that resolves disputes and maintains family dignity.

Divorce does not have to be death. It can be a new beginning.

In keeping with Collaborative Practice, Dr. Napolitano collaborated with attorney Judy Lund who added her expertise and thoughts to help her complete this article.



Special Announcements:

CALENDAR: The Sullivan Center will be closed for Thanksgiving (Thurs. & Fri. 11/26-27), Christmas (Fri. & Sat. 12/25-26), and New Years (Fri. & Sat. 1/1-2). Groups will be cancelled on the Saturdays after Thanksgiving (11/28), Christmas (12/26), and New Years (1/2). Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for the holidays and to let your therapist know of upcoming vacation dates.

GROUPS: We currently offer 8 different groups:

Tuesday afternoons—young teen girls

Tuesday nights—high schoolers

Wednesday nights—6th-7th boys social skills

Thursday nights—parents group

Friday afternoons—young teen boys

Friday afternoons - young adults

Saturday mornings 10am - 8-12 yr. olds

Saturday mornings 11am - 4-8 yr. olds

PARENTING SEMINARS: The Sullivan Center is proud to offer two seminars to help parents succeed. Both are based on the popular books by Elaine Mazlish and Adele Faber and will be led by David Wolter, M.A.:

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen

(six 2-hour sessions begin Wed. 1/20 at 7pm; cost \$25 each session)

Siblings Without Rivalry

(six 2-hour sessions begin Wed. 4/7 at 7pm; cost \$25 each session)

Watch for flyers in our lobbies (and on our newsletter page of our website) for more details on these important group seminars. You can also sign up now by calling our office at 271-1186.

Books to Help Kids When Parents are Divorcing:

by David Wolter, M.A.

Fifty percent of marriages end in divorce despite our initial good intentions. That means that about half of this reading audience (maybe even more) has come from a divorced family or is in the middle of turmoil themselves now. Divorce of parents affects children in different ways. One way to help your child receive the support they need is to read books with them on the topic and to be receptive to their feedback on what is difficult to them. The following are some great books for children and parents on divorce:

Two Homes by Claire Masurel and Kady MacDonald Denton (baby—preschool)

Mama and Daddy Bear's Divorce by Cornelia Maude Spelman and Kathy Parkinson (ages 4-8)

It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear: A Read-Together Book for Parents and Young Children During Divorce by Vicki Lansky (ages 4-8)

Dinosaurs Divorce by Marc Brown and Laurie Kransny Brown (ages 4-8)

Was It the Chocolate Pudding?: A Story For Little Kids About Divorce by Sandra Levins and Bryan Langdo (ages 4-8)

Let's Talk About It: Divorce (Mr. Rogers) by Fred Rogers (ages 4-8)

The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce by Richard Gardner (ages 9-12)

Vicki Lansky's Divorce Book for Parents: Helping Your Children with Divorce and Its Aftermath by Vicki Lansky (parents)

The Parents Book About Divorce by Richard Gardner (parents)

All of these books can be obtained as new or used copies through Amazon.com or Half.com. Probably the best part of reading with your child is helping them feel like they are not alone; they are valued and understood. "Quality time is an accident that happens in quantity time."

Digital Natives vs. Digital Immigrants

by Betsy Jost, LMFT

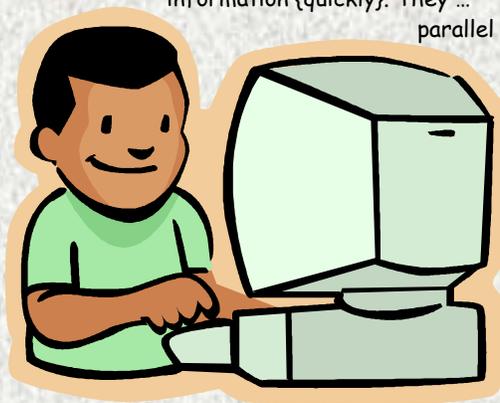
Have you noticed that children's behavior has changed over the past years? It is now common to observe even young children checking in with their parents throughout the day on their own cell phone, texting friends, and playing interactive online games in real time with friends who are physically near as well as on the other side of the world. Older teens keep track of social events on MySpace and Facebook, instantly keep up on the latest activities of movie stars with Twitter as well as make the more standard use of computing to conduct research for school projects. They may post blogs, download movies, watch videos and buy the latest songs.

Students have the opportunity to keep up with some of the latest news events as they occur and provide feedback about the process to the specific political personality of the moment.

According to Marc Prensky, in "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants", today's youth who have spent their entire lives surrounded by technology, have changed in fundamental ways. Just as the Baby Boomers' brains adjusted to and changed with the introduction of television, children born in the recent decades show measurable differences in how they think and process information. Dr. Bruce D. Perry identified the changes even more radically, stating that "different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures".

Prensky calls children who've grown up surrounded by technology, "Digital Natives"---due to the ease with which this generation interacts with the electronic medium. Those who become socialized and educated without exposure to technology before adulthood, Prensky calls "Digital Immigrants". People who learn a language later in life [including the language of technology] use a different part of the brain than if the same person had learned the language when they were younger. "As Digital Immigrants learn...they always retain, to some degree, their 'accent'...."

"Digital Natives are used to receiving information {quickly}. They ... parallel



process and multi-task. They prefer graphic before text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to 'serious work'."

These new behavioral changes create communication difficulties, especially in the

field of education. Teachers and parents often say that students have a short attention span, yet their attention spans are *not* short for games. It is not yet known whether students often can't pay attention or refuse to pay attention. Prensky notes that a "generation that can memorize over 100 Pokemon characters with all their characteristics, history and evolution can't {seem to} learn the names, populations, capitals and relationships of all the 101 nations in the world".

An additional concern is that current use of technology does not lend itself to teaching students how to reflect and learn from experience. "One of the most interesting challenges and opportunities in teaching Digital Natives is to figure out and invent ways to include reflection and critical thinking in the learning...but still do it in the Digital Native language."

One thing that appears to continue to be true, is that "Practice---time spent on learning---works." It seems that game based programming captures the imagination of this generation and kids are willing to pay close attention to what they play. Intense focus and practice are the necessary prerequisites for learning any new skill, be it academic or relational---and, this intense focus and use of technology during the years of childhood seems to be changing the brain itself.

{This article is based on Marc Prensky's "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants" from *On the Horizon*, MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001}

Meet the Staff: Betsy Jost, LMFT

by Anthony Lee, M.A.

Betsy Jost came to the Sullivan Center for Children in January of 2001. She is a native of the Central Valley and earned her Master's of Science degree from Fresno State University specializing in Marriage and Family Therapy. While at Fresno State she completed several internships, including working at a county mental health agency with children, adolescents, and families, and with a non-profit agency

providing therapy for the general population, victims of child abuse, victims of crimes, as well as individuals who were court-ordered to work on domestic violence issues.

Betsy has had a long-time interest in working with children and families and was a teacher for many years prior to completing her graduate studies. She displays a strong desire to help others and greatly enjoys working with people of all ages. Her specialized interests regarding treatment

include depth therapy, object relations, and Jungian therapy, and she regularly utilizes sandplay therapy with her clients.

Betsy also has a strong desire to study and learn about a wide variety of different topics related to treatment and theory.

Other staff have stated that Betsy "is a very friendly and kind person" and "we are grateful to have her here at the Sullivan Center for Children!"

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"Understanding
the World
Through a
Child's Eyes."

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Questions and Answers About the Digital Age

by Jamie Milotz, Psy.D.

Many parents of teenagers worry about their children's use of social networking websites such as MySpace or Facebook. Attempting to block their use of these immensely popular sites is rarely successful, and likely results in arguments ending in, "Everyone is doing it... you just don't understand!" The questions below represent some of the most frequently asked questions regarding teens and internet safety.

Q: How should I talk to my kids about MySpace? I don't know anything about it!

A: Given the fact that most kids know more about MySpace than their parents, approach the topic in a curious way, rather than a controlling way. Let them know that you are interested in learning more about MySpace, especially because it is so important to them. Ask them to show you their profile. Find out what their favorite things to do are, such as looking at friends' pictures, listening to music, etc.... Ask them to show you how they keep their MySpace page safe, including what privacy settings they have, and the level of personal information they share. Some parents prefer to make a MySpace account for themselves as a way to become more familiar with the site, and to also occasionally monitor the activities of their kids. However, this is something that should be discussed with your child beforehand, otherwise it will be perceived as being too "snoopy." Take this opportunity to let your child be the expert and teach you something new!

Q: I only hear bad things about MySpace and Facebook in the news, and I'm afraid to let my children be involved with it. What should I do?

A: When using internet social networking sites, as with any type of activity your children participate in, good judgment is key. Just as you taught them to stay away from strangers as a young child, it is now your job to help them understand what is OK or not OK to post on their profile pages. Maintaining open communication with your child about the dangers and potential consequences of posting information on the internet is important. Make sure they understand that once they put any type of information or pictures up, they have very little control over what happens to that information next. Therefore, a good rule of thumb is that they shouldn't post anything that they wouldn't want their parents, teacher, or principal to see.

From the Director: Rediscovering the Real Holidays

by Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP

The Holidays are upon us. For many it has been a difficult year — a good time to reflect on how and what we celebrate. Increasingly in recent times the focus for many parents has been on how many presents they can buy for their children. Parents feel badly, even guilty, if they cannot get their children all of the toys and gadgets on their "list". For many, the holidays have lost their true meaning for lots of reasons - none of them good.

Interpersonally, the holidays should be about taking time to show how much you appreciate what you have, what you have had, and those in your life. They are about giving thanks and love, not toys and grand gifts. It is easy to lose sight of this and in so doing fail to communicate to your children the true meaning of the holidays. I am always left in dismay when I ask children about the holidays and they proceed with a list of the usually very expensive presents they have told parents they want. When I ask them what they are doing to give to those they love and appreciate, many look at me in a state of bewilderment as if they never even thought about it; and most of the time they say "I don't know," "nothing," or "I don't have any money." We do our children no favors by making their holidays "happy" with things. And we do them no favors when we fail to teach them that the holidays are a time for them to show their love and appreciation - no money is necessary. It is a perfect time to simplify your holidays and at the same time flood your children and your family with meaning and ritual. Openly discuss



with your children your desire to change the way you've celebrated before. Reasonable gifts are fine, but teach your children from the earliest of ages the lasting nature of relationships and the fleeting happiness of things. Focus on family and relationships - not Santa Claus. Slow down the frantic "perfect" preparations and schedules and spend some of that saved time with your children and family. Create or enjoy your family and/or religious rituals. Read stories by the fire, go for walks and drink hot chocolate; bake cookies with the kids - who cares how they turn out. Teach your children about the spirit of giving; help them show their feelings in the small but ever so meaningful ways that children can. Stop asking them to make a list of what they want; help them make a list of what they will do or give to others. Teach them how to give of themselves - their time, their energy. Teach them to sacrifice something of their own for someone else. Be sensitive to the fact that your child may need help on how to show their feelings to people important to them some of whom may no longer be important to you - especially children from broken families. There are so many ways that children can give to others. They can draw a card or picture, help with a task, perform a dance or song or poem, pledge good behavior, clean their room, let a brother or sister go first, get up when mom or dad ask, give an old toy to a needy child, do a chore that will earn them some money to buy a small gift for someone, or create a present for the teacher. Teach your children - and rediscover for yourself - the true meaning and importance of the holidays.