A SMALL GROUP INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN

EXPERIENCING PARENTAL SEPARATION OR DIVORCE

by

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Practicum report submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Many children experience the separation or divorce of their parents. Research has shown that this family transition can be experienced as a time of stress for children. Some children experience emotional and behavioural problems during this time. As well, they tend to lack adaptive coping skills. One type of intervention that has been developed to help children through this family transition is a small group intervention. The purpose of this practicum was to develop, facilitate, and evaluate this type of intervention for children whose parents have separated or divorced. The program format and content were based on literature suggesting best practice issues for this type of intervention. The specific activities were compiled from various existing programs. Two 8 week groups were run, with between six and eight children in each group. Children were between the ages of 9 and 12. The evaluation component consisted of a pre-post design using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The results showed improvements in some areas, including children's behaviours, beliefs, and self-esteem. Due to the small sample size, statistically significant findings were difficult to obtain on quantitative measures. However, the trend in scores was in the expected direction for one measure, Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce scale (Kurdek & Berg, 1987). Factors that were present in the children's external environment were also examined, including parental conflict, participation in other interventions, and family changes. Finally, an individual case study analysis was done for each child. Suggestions for future designs and evaluations of this type of intervention are presented.

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Chapter One: Overview of Practicum

The purpose of this practicum was to develop knowledge and skills in planning, facilitating, and evaluating a small group intervention for children who have experienced parental separation or divorce. This overview chapter will identify the goals of the intervention, my learning goals, the implementation setting, and the relevance and rationale for this practicum.

Intervention Goals

Overall, this intervention was expected to help children cope more effectively with their parents' separation/divorce. It was expected that these children would show improvements in two main areas; their emotional responses and their behaviour. Through an accurate understanding of the divorce and an opportunity to discuss their feelings, receive support, and provide support to other children, they were helped to improve their self-esteem and sense of self-competence. It was also expected that they would behave more appropriately in various social situations through the use of the skills learned in the group for solving problems, controlling anger, and expressing feelings. Children were also expected to show positive social adjustment in terms of interacting with peers.

For this practicum, two eight-week groups were facilitated. Each weekly session was one hour and a half long. The content of the sessions covered topics relevant to children's adjustment to parental divorce or separation. Sessions also included various age-appropriate activities that were related to the topic of the session. Following the conclusion of each group, an evaluation occurred to determine whether or not the children who participated improved on expected target variables.

Learning Goals

The learning goals for this practicum involved the development of knowledge and skills in the area of interventions for children who have experienced the divorce or separation of their parents.

I had three main goals with regard to the development of knowledge. One goal was to expand my knowledge of the effects of parental divorce or separation on children. This included increasing my understanding of the factors that place children at risk for developmental and adjustment problems as well as the factors that are associated with positive adaptation to this family transition. A second goal was to gain a better understanding of what types of interventions exist for this population and which are believed to be most effective and why. A final goal was to increase my understanding of group processes and group dynamics.

My learning goals in terms of skill-building pertained to developing, planning, and evaluating a clinical intervention. One goal was to build my skills in developing the structure and content of a group program for children. In terms of facilitation skills, my learning goals related to creating a group atmosphere where children feel safe in expressing their thoughts and feelings, and creating cohesion among the children in the group to help them establish a supportive network of peers. A third goal was to develop my teaching skills. This was in the form of educating children about divorce in a way that allowed them to develop an accurate understanding. I also wanted to learn how to teach children coping skills in a way that they could be incorporated into the children's repertoire of coping behaviours.

My current understanding of the effects of divorce/separation on children and interventions for children began through research and integrated assignments completed for courses taken in the Master of Social Work program. My knowledge of group work and group processes was based on a seminar I took on group practice in social work. This provided a theory and knowledge base for group work practice issues.

My current skill level was based on experiences gained through co-facilitating a similar group for children aged 10 to 12 at the agency where this practicum was implemented. I was also involved in administrative aspects of this program. Other group experiences included facilitating short-term educational groups for children in this age range. I had facilitated programs for children in grades 6 to 8 on improving their study skills and a baby-sitting skills course for children aged 12. I also had experience working with families in this area through placement and volunteer experiences.

In sum, this practicum allowed me to further build on my understanding of this population and basic skills previously developed in facilitating groups. I wanted to apply this knowledge and skill to a population of children experiencing separation and divorce[1].

Implementation Context

This practicum was implemented through Family Conciliation, an agency that provides services to parents and children experiencing divorce/separation. There is a program for children aged 8 to 12 that is currently operating at this agency. Their current

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[1] The terms separation and divorce will be used interchangeably throughout this report for simplicity sake. It should be understood that these terms have different legal meanings (Manitoba Justice, 1999). However, children are affected by the fact that their parents have chosen to live apart, regardless of whether or not they are legally separated or divorced (Grych & Fincham, 1992).

program was developed from an existing model and adapted by an employee of the agency. It had not been formally evaluated for its effectiveness with this population.

The intervention implemented in this practicum was developed based on evaluation information in the literature on interventions for children of divorce. It incorporated various components that have been identified as important in helping children cope. This included support, education, and skill development. The program that exists at the agency focuses primarily on education and support. This practicum intervention emphasized the skill-building components in addition to education and support. This practicum also included a mechanism for transferring general information to parents and involving parents in children's improvements outside the group setting. This was through interviews conducted with parents following the conclusion of the group.

The evaluation component of this practicum intervention provided the agency with information about the effectiveness of the model that was implemented. This information can be used to make decisions about the continuation of a program along similar lines.

Rationale and Relevance to Social Work Practice

Divorce and separation are becoming more common among families in our society and affect a large number of children. Although many children are able to successfully adapt to their parents' divorce, there are some children who experience this transition as a time of stress. This can have a negative impact on their development and well-being. Although the number of divorces filed in Canada has slightly decreased since 2000, there are still a large number of people obtaining divorces. For example, the total

number of divorces that occurred in 2000 was 71,144 and custody arrangements were made for 37,000 dependent children through the court system (The Daily, 2002). In 2002, 70,155 divorces were finalized in Canada (Winnipeg Free Press, 2004). In Manitoba, the number of divorces has decreased since 1998, but still remained high at 2,430 divorces in 2000 (The Daily, 2002). It is important to note that these statistics do not reflect the number of parents who have separated but were not married. Children in these families are also affected. Therefore, although general divorce rates are decreasing, there are a still a large number of children who are affected by parental divorce or separation. These children may be experiencing difficulties in adjusting to this family transition (i.e., in emotional, behavioural, social, or academic areas). This suggests the need for interventions to address children who are experiencing these difficulties.

For children who experience problems adjusting to separation, these problems may not resolve themselves on their own and, in fact, may worsen over time. The literature has shown that the negative effects of divorce and separation may continue for some children long after the actual divorce itself (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989; Di Bias, 1996). O'Halloran and Carr (2000) indicate that 20% to 25% of children develop long-term adjustment difficulties. Longitudinal research on the effects of divorce, which was first done by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), has found that negative effects may still be present in adulthood (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Kelly, 2000; Petersen & Steinman, 1994). For example, these children may have difficulty in future relationships. They tend to be more likely to marry in adolescence, become a divorced family, or become a single-parent family. Some research has shown that socially, these children tend to be perceived negatively by peers and show behavioural problems that continue

into adulthood. Academically, they have been found to have poor school performance and lower levels of educational attainment (i.e., higher rates of high school drop out) (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001).

Psychological effects have been found to extend into adulthood and, as adults, children of divorce have been shown to have decreased life satisfaction and low self-esteem (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). Therefore, interventions that can be shown to reduce these negative effects and possibly avoid long-term consequences are of value for social work practice. This can have implications at a community level as well.

Children of divorce may enter into a cycle where they will need to make use of social service programs and mental health services throughout their entire lives. As adults, children of divorce are more likely to be in receipt of welfare (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). As well, some researchers have suggested that children of divorce are more likely to become clinically disturbed and have a higher rate of clinical problems than do children from families that have not divorced (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). Grych and Fincham (1992) note that children of divorce have a higher referral rate for mental health services than children who do not experience divorce. Therefore, these children may use a disproportionate amount of mental health resources and services in the community (Lamb & Sternberg, 1997).

It is clear that interventions are needed early on in children's divorce experience to help with short- and long-term problems. This also has implications at a policy level, in terms of recognizing the importance of developing interventions for children as part of larger programs and services in place to help families experiencing separation and divorce.

Rationale for Group Format

The group setting has been commonly used with this population and the literature suggests that the small group intervention is a valuable and effective intervention for helping these children (This will be discussed further in the next chapter). This form of intervention has been shown to help children adjust in the short-term, as well as be preventative for long-term problems (e.g., Short, 1998; Wolchik et al., 2002). A group setting may be preferable to individual intervention for many practical reasons as well. First, group-based interventions are a cost-effective form of service delivery (Turner & Dadds, 2001). They allow more children to be helped in a shorter period of time. Second, social services and community agencies tend to have limited resources in terms of time and staff. Therefore, working with many children on an individual basis may be a lengthy process and children may have to wait to receive help (Grych & Fincham, 1992).

To summarize, this practicum provided a needed service to a portion of a large population at risk for experiencing developmental and adjustment problems. If the problems are left unaddressed they can continue to affect children throughout their lives, creating increased pressure on the social service system. The evaluation aspect of this practicum added to the knowledge base of interventions for this population and can influence program and policy development.

The following chapter will elaborate on the characteristics identified in the literature on children of divorce, describe the relevant aspects of small group interventions that have been implemented with this population, and review the effectiveness of these interventions. The third chapter will describe, in detail, the intervention that was implemented in this practicum. The fourth and final chapter will present the results of the evaluation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Target Population: Children of Divorce and Separation

The intervention developed in this practicum was directed at children whose parents have separated. There are various issues that have been identified in the literature that characterize this population. However, there are two points worth mentioning before discussing these issues. First, children whose parents separate do not automatically encounter the difficulties described below. For example, Caplan and Caplan (1999) suggest that 60% of children will overcome the difficulties and positively adjust to divorce. Second, it is not necessarily the separation itself that causes these problems. For example, recent literature has suggested that the level of conflict between parents or the child's functioning prior to the separation may play an important role in how they adjust after (see Brown, Eichenberger, Portes, & Christensen, 1992; Kelly, 1993, 2000). This intervention was designed to address those children who may be experiencing difficulties in adjustment and coping and may be at risk of developing problems in the future.

Emotional and Behavioural Problems

Children of divorce can experience many practical changes such as moving to a new home, neighbourhood, and/or school. They also tend to experience a decrease in socio-economic status (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). These changes may be compounded by emotional and behavioural problems such as internalizing and externalizing behaviours. Internalizing behaviours include depression, withdrawal, guilt, anxiety, grief, shame, embarrassment, helplessness, loneliness, regret, lack of control, and loss of self-esteem (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Kurtz, 1994; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988).

Children of divorce also have been found to have lower levels of perceived self-efficacy (both socially and academically) and self-concept (Kurtz, 1994). These problems tend to occur within children and are not as readily observable to those outside the child. Externalizing behaviours are more easily observed. These include impulse control difficulties, immaturity, anger, acting-out, academic problems, peer relationship problems, and social adjustment difficulties (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988).

Coping Skills

Parental separation is a transitional event in the lives of family members and children may perceive this to be a negative event. Snyder, Ford, and Harris (1987) define a negative life event as an incident that a person attributes to their experience of physical or psychological pain. It is common for people to attempt to make some sense out of the situation in order to understand it better. This often results in a "theory" about why the incident happened (Snyder et al., 1987). These theories are not necessarily accurate and can result in cognitive distortions.

Children who experience parental separation may experience these distortions. Common thoughts and feelings of children who experience divorce include blaming themselves for the divorce or blaming one parent or the other, fear of abandonment, unrealistic fantasies of parents reuniting, and loyalty conflicts between parents (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). These cognitions, many of which are inaccurate, have been shown to have negative effects on how children cope with divorce (Grych & Fincham, 1997).

People turn to various coping strategies or behaviours when they encounter stressful situations. Coping is used to decrease the psychological pain the person is experiencing (Snyder et al., 1987). These authors suggest that better coping abilities lead to a decrease in the experience of stress or psychological pain. Therefore, children's ability to effectively cope with divorce plays a role in how they will adjust. It has been suggested that children of divorce tend to exhibit a restricted range of coping styles (i.e., rigid, passive coping styles) and their coping styles tend to be less effective (Fischer, 1999; Kurtz, 1994). This places them at risk for decreased self-esteem (Brown, Eichenberger, Portes, & Christensen, 1992).

How a person copes with a situation depends on how they attribute the reason or cause for that situation. Research has shown that children's beliefs about divorce, their level of insight into the divorce, and their affective interpretation play a role in their adjustment (Brown, Eichenberger, Portes, & Christensen, 1992; Kurtz, 1994; Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). Having an internal or external locus of control may affect whether children use active or passive coping strategies when dealing with divorce (Fogas, Wolchik, Braver, Smith Freedom, & Bay, 1992). Children often feel that they are responsible for the divorce (i.e., an internal locus of control), which can prevent them from effectively coping with the transition. As well, children's self-esteem and self-efficacy are used as cognitive coping resources (Kurtz, 1994). Having cognitions that tend to be distorted can negatively affect how they see themselves and therefore, may affect their ability to cope in an adaptive way.

Role of parental behaviour. Negative parent-child interactions and conflict between parents are factors that have been found to affect children's adjustment to the

separation (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Wolchik et al., 2000). Interparental conflict itself, whether in the context of divorced or intact families, has a negative effect on children's development (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Kelly, 2000). Children of divorce report conflict between parents as the most stressful aspect of divorce (Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Consequently, if the divorce was to lessen the amount of conflict children are exposed to, it may help in their adjustment and well-being (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). Research findings suggest that the higher the level of conflict between parents, the more likely it is to have a negative effect on children (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998). Walsh and Stolberg (1989) found that high levels of parent hostility were related to internalizing behaviours in children. They also found that when this hostility occurred recently after the separation, anger and externalizing problems were more likely to be present. This highlights the role of conflict between parents in children's adjustment to divorce. It also suggests that family factors, in addition to individual factors, play a role in children's adjustment and ability to cope with divorce. Therefore, both individual factors and family factors may need to be addressed in interventions.

To summarize, some children who experience parental divorce have been found to exhibit emotional and behavioural problems that affect their development and adjustment to the divorce. Their existing coping styles have also been found to be ineffective in helping them work through this transition. In addition to these individual adjustment difficulties, circumstances in their family environment can further hamper their

adjustment. Thus, there is a need for interventions to address these risk factors and assist

children in coping with this family transition.

<div align="center">Interventions for Children of Divorce</div>

Parent-Focused Interventions

Interventions can be directed at parents to help them create a home atmosphere

more conducive to their children's development and adjustment. Two main types of

programs have been developed for parents. One type are educational groups that focus on

providing parents with information to help them understand children's reactions to

divorce, how to minimize conflict with the other parent, and how to avoid behaving in

ways that have a negative impact on children (Gentry, 1997). Some programs also teach

parents skills for managing child behaviour problems (Grych & Fincham, 1992). These

programs have been rated favourably by parents and have been shown to have some

positive effects on children's adjustment (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Bacon &

McKenzie, 2001; Di Bias, 1996).

A second type of program is a support group where parents can be helped with

their own adjustment to divorce. This is intended to help parents directly, but can have an

indirect effect on children by making parents more available to help children in their

adjustment and improving the parent-child relationship (Wolchik et al., 2000). These

programs, although helpful for parents, have not always been found to have direct

benefits for children (e.g., Stolberg & Garrison, 1985). It appears that parent-focused

programs can help alleviate some problems for children; however, there is still a need for

interventions to address children directly.

Child-Focused Interventions

One form of intervention for children of divorce is individual therapy. One example of this is play therapy (Hodges, 1991). This has been suggested for younger children because they are not developmentally able to discuss thoughts and feelings for any great length of time (Hodges, 1991). Other individual therapies have been modelled on different perspectives of divorce, including a loss model (to help children in the grieving process) and a crisis intervention model (Hodges, 1991). Most individual therapy approaches have been limited to children under the age of eight. Hodges explains that there have not been specific strategies developed for individual therapy approaches for children in the late latency period (10 to 12 years). In addition, there is very little literature citing empirical evaluations on the effectiveness of individual therapy with children of divorce. Grych and Fincham (1992) suggest that a group approach for this age group may be preferred over individual interventions.

Small group interventions have been commonly used with children of divorce. In the literature, these groups have been referred to as psychoeducational groups (e.g., Slavkin, 2000) or support groups (e.g., Farmer & Galaris, 1993; Stolberg & Gourley, 1996) depending on the focus of the intervention. For the purpose of this practicum, the group will be referred to as a small group intervention because it includes various components, including support and education.

Small Group Interventions

The purpose of small group interventions is to help children cope with negative feelings, misconceptions, and practical problems that they experience after their parents separate (Grych & Fincham, 1992). These interventions are intended to support children,

facilitate their identification and expression of feelings, provide information about divorce, teach coping and communication skills, and normalize the separation experience (Geelhoed, Blaisure, & Geasler, 2001; Hodges, 1991). The group also allows children to share their experiences of parental divorce with other children and develop a supportive network of peers. Finally, children learn skills to cope with their feelings and with situations that they are faced with in this transition (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001).

There are many benefits of helping children in a group setting which suggest that this intervention is valuable. First, the group setting is appropriate for children in the target age group of this practicum. At this age, they are mature enough to be able to verbally identify and discuss their divorce experiences and feelings. As well, it is beneficial for children to be able to express their feelings in a confidential setting, without their parents present. This may encourage more openness in the expression of feelings because children do not need to fear parental reactions or hurting their parents' feelings (Geelhoed, Blaisure, & Geasler, 2001).

Second, it is important to provide children with support at a time when they need it most. Research has found that soon after the separation occurs, the family structure in is less supportive and that parents tend to be less emotionally and physically available for their children (Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). As well, children's school support network may be disrupted (Kurtz, 1994). Therefore, children may have minimal social resources to use for coping and the group can help to fill that gap in support.

Finally, research on small group interventions for children of divorce has provided evidence that this particular type of intervention is an effective model for addressing the

specific experiences of children whose parents have separated or divorced (e.g., Carr, 2000). For example, two studies have reported improvements in children's behaviour and emotional well-being after participating in small group interventions (Fischer, 1999; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985).

There are also some limitations to this type of intervention that need to be considered. One limitation is that children who are shy or do not thrive in group settings may not benefit as much from the group as they would from an individual intervention. This may be because they do not feel comfortable talking in front of the group and therefore may not experience the satisfaction that comes with talking about one's feelings. A second limitation is that children who have certain learning disabilities or attention disorders may not be able to participate effectively in the activities used in these groups. Therefore, these children may not receive the full benefits of the group experience. These limitations can be alleviated through pre-screening children to determine whether or not they would benefit from the group experience or from individual support or therapy.

The programs that are described and evaluated in the literature are long-term programs where children meet on a weekly basis for a specified length of time. Each session focuses on a topic that is related to a specific aspect of divorce (e.g., self-blame) or facilitating children's post-divorce adjustment (e.g., normalizing feelings). Throughout the sessions, affective, support, education, and skill components are present. Two small group interventions for children of divorce have been prominently described in the literature. One is the Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP) (e.g., Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985) which is directed only at children. A second is the Divorce

Adjustment Project (DAP) (e.g., Stolberg & Garrison, 1985) which includes a children's support group as a component of a larger intervention program that is directed at parents. These particular programs are school-based interventions.

There have also been interventions designed to be implemented in community settings. One of these programs was developed through Saskatchewan Justice and Family Law Support Services (1999). The format is similar to that described in the literature. At this time, there has not been any published evaluation information on the effectiveness of this program. The Calgary Counselling Centre (1985) also developed a community program, which is similar to other programs. However, one difference is that their program includes a component for parent involvement. This practicum intervention was based largely on the integration of aspects of these four programs. However, activities of other programs and resources were incorporated as well, including *Caught in the Middle* (Pomrenke, 1996), the children's group already in place at Family Conciliation.

Best Practices in Small Group Interventions

A number of assumptions should guide the development of interventions for children of divorce. For example, it is important to recognize that some children seem to be better able to cope with separation. There may be certain factors that are present for children who are more resilient in coping with this family transition. It has been suggested that it may be helpful to create those same conditions for children who are having difficulty coping (Caplan & Caplan, 1999). This is best done through an understanding of the risk and protective factors that contribute to child adjustment and increasing factors associated with positive outcomes (Turner & Dadds, 2001).

Protective Factors

One protective factor identified in the literature is social support (e.g., Brown, Portes, & Christensen, 1989). Children who have social support during and after divorce have fewer adjustment problems, show a reduction in stress, and have fewer mental health problems (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Kliewer & Sandler, 1993). Social support can be found through peers, family friends, extended family members, teachers, coaches, or any person who a child can talk to or confide in about their home situation. The small group intervention can help facilitate a supportive network for children as well as teach them the importance of actively seeking out support on their own.

A second protective factor that has been identified in helping children adjust to divorce is the use of active coping strategies. Kliewer and Sandler (1993) found that avoidance coping strategies were related to psychological problems in children and active coping strategies were related to social competence. Children actively cope through seeking social support, reinterpreting stressful situations positively, attempting to understand why the situation is happening, and avoiding situations that may produce trouble (Kliewer & Sandler, 1993). Therefore, interventions should help children develop active coping strategies that are associated with positive outcomes.

Finally, children who adjust well to divorce often have a positive home environment and relationship with their parents. Research indicates the need for factors in children's environment to be addressed, as these external factors play a role in children's adjustment to divorce (e.g., Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Kelly, 1993, 2000). Therefore, the importance of parents being actively involved in helping their child adjust should be a part of interventions for children. This practicum intervention included

a method for involving parents in maintaining some of the benefits gained in the group setting.

Support and Skill Components

Another best practice issue that has been identified in the literature is the importance of interventions that provide children with both support and skill-building. Although the support component of small group interventions is helpful, that aspect alone may not be sufficient to alleviate the problems experienced by children (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). Therefore, this support should be combined with providing children with specific skills for dealing with situations that they experience in this transition (Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). It is the combination of support and skill-building that has been found to lead to successful outcomes (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Hodges, 1991). Support and skill-building are both important components of the DAP and CODIP programs described earlier.

Theoretical Basis

The main theoretical framework that underlies this intervention is derived from a cognitive-behavioural theory. Programs described in the literature are based on the theory that divorce is a stressful event in children's lives and that post-divorce adjustment can be facilitated by teaching children cognitive-behavioural skills as well as by providing them with emotional support. This theory assumes that people's behaviours are influenced by how they view their world, that is, their cognitive interpretation of their world (Ronen, 1997). A person's thoughts, perceptions, and behaviours are learned through social interactions with, and emotional responses to, their environment (Kendall, 1993; Staats, 1996). Zarb (1992) suggests that the two major types of interventions that influence this

perspective are (a) cognitive restructuring and (b) behavioural coping skills. This theory suggests an inter-relatedness of people's beliefs, behaviours, and emotions. These connections are aspects considered in the development of cognitive-behavioural interventions.

According to this theory, people's thoughts and perceptions are believed to affect their behaviour. If these thoughts and perceptions are distorted, it can result in maladaptive behaviour. Therefore, changing a person's inaccurate cognitions will help them to work towards changing their behaviour (Ronen, 1997). Cognitive restructuring can help children process feelings about divorce and correctly attribute responsibility and blame (Stolberg & Garrison, 1985). Zarb (1992) suggests that the purpose of cognitive-behavioural therapy is to "reduce the frequency of the client's maladaptive responses and to teach new cognitive and behavioural skills" (p. 3). The goal of cognitive-behavioural interventions, then, is to elicit changes in the person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (Kendall, 1993). The helper should determine the person's inaccurate cognitions, restructure them to be more accurate, and help the person to develop effective coping strategies to deal with their issues (Freeman, 1983).

Educating children about divorce may also be helpful for their adjustment. Roseby and Deutsch (1985) found that an increase in knowledge helped children resolve some of the cognitive aspects related to their post-divorce adjustment. However, the knowledge alone did not address the children's emotional or behavioural issues. This strengthens the use of a combination of support, education, and skill-components for addressing children's emotional and behavioural needs.

To summarize, it is important that the format and content of interventions address factors that are known to help children adjust to divorce through the format and content of the intervention. Social support, effective coping strategies, an accurate understanding of divorce, and a positive home environment are all factors that have been shown to help children adjust to divorce. Children's groups which focus on these areas can be helpful.

Evaluation of Small Group Interventions

Although there are some limitations in research on this type of intervention, the majority of evaluations of children's groups have indicated positive outcomes. In general, these interventions have been found to be effective in addressing children's emotional and behavioural problems related to parental divorce, which has implications for helping children in social and academic areas.

Emotional Improvements

Children who participated in a small group intervention showed a decrease in sadness, anxiety, and insecurity and improved self-concept and self-esteem (Fisher, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1992; Hodges, 1991; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001; Short, 1998; Stolberg & Garrison, 1985). Children have also showed increases in their sense of control over their life, reported feeling more accepted, and had higher aspirations (Hodges, 1991). Other program evaluations found that children had resolved their self-blame and had an increased understanding of the causes of the divorce (Fischer, 1999). As well, children showed less negative self-perceptions and perceptions of the divorce after completing a small group intervention (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). These findings

suggest that small group interventions may help children's emotional and psychological adjustment to divorce.

Behavioural Improvements

Children who participated in these groups also showed improvement in their behaviour. For example, some children improved in the area of communication about the divorce with their parents and the expression of feelings. They also showed a decrease in acting-out behaviour, and overall better adjustment at home (Fisher, 1999; Hodges, 1991; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). Children also showed an increase in assertive behaviour and frustration tolerance (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). Children who have attended group interventions have also demonstrated an improvement in their use of coping skills (emotional and problem-solving) and reduced antisocial behaviour. In addition, one study found that children who participated in groups were less likely to report engaging in substance abuse (Short, 1998).

Teacher ratings of children who completed these programs indicated a decrease in learning and behavioural problems, improvement in school related competencies, an increase in rule compliance, and improved peer sociability (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). Children's social skills have also been shown to improve after completing the group, although in some instances, this improvement did not appear until a 5 month follow-up (Hodges, 1991; Grych & Fincham, 1992; Stolberg & Garrison, 1985). In one program, positive emotional and behavioural improvements in children were present 2 years later, indicating the potential for enduring outcomes of the intervention (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989).

Despite the many positive findings of small group interventions for children of divorce, some evaluations have found that children who participate in these programs do not always show improvements. For example, Skitka and Frazier (1995), found no changes in children's emotional well-being after participating in a group for children. As well, there was no statistical support for improvement in children's beliefs about divorce or their self-esteem. There was no indication that children's depressive symptoms or their academic performance improved as a result of participation in the group. Pedro-Carroll and Cowen (1985) found that although children improved in most areas, there was no improvement in their classroom behaviours as reported by their teachers. There was also no improvement found in the children's perceived self-competence. It is important to note that these programs did not have a negative effect on children's adjustment, they just did not lead to measurable improvements in all expected areas. A control group was used in the evaluation by Skitka and Frazier. This group showed similar improvements as the treatment group. For example, it was found that, generally, as children developed more realistic views of divorce, they showed fewer depressive symptoms and their academic success and self-esteem improved. This occurred whether or not they received the group intervention.

Skitka and Frazier (1995) also reviewed previous research on small groups for children and found mixed results on whether or not small group interventions were effective. These authors suggest that several factors contribute to these mixed findings, such as methodological flaws in previous evaluations (i.e., lack of comparison groups, small sample sizes, measures with insufficient psychometric properties, severity of children's symptoms prior to program) or inconsistencies in implementation practices.

In sum, there is research available that supports the effectiveness of small group interventions in children's development and adjustment to the divorce in areas that tend to be problematic, as well as having some potential long-term benefits. While it is important to note that not all programs have demonstrated improvements, these programs have not been found to negatively affect children's well-being.

Methodology

Most programs described in the literature used pre-post comparisons in their evaluations. Many used follow-up measures as well, ranging from a few weeks to 2 years following the group (e.g., Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989; Cowen, 1996; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985). In evaluating small group interventions, the main methods used have been self-reports, questionnaires developed by the researchers, and standardized measures. Stolberg and Garrison's (1985) DAP used the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, which was filled out by the child, and the Child Behavior Checklist, which was filled out by the parent. In Pedro-Carroll and Cowen's (1985) CODIP, teachers filled out a Classroom Adjustment Rating Scale and children completed a Perceived Competence Scale and a State-Trait Anxiety Inventory for Children. The questionnaires developed by the researchers were completed by parents and group facilitators.

There are several limitations to the research methodology used to evaluate these groups. First, outcomes are based mainly on parents' and teachers' reports of children. It is difficult to know how accurate these reports are in depicting actual change in children. As well, parents, teachers, and group facilitators were often aware of which children participated in the intervention, a factor that could bias their observations of those

children. These evaluations also relied on children's self-reports of changes in their feelings and behaviours. It is difficult to determine if these self-reports accurately reflect positive changes or if they reflect the children wanting to appear as though they are doing well. However, combining children's and parents' information can help to create a more accurate picture of changes.

A second limitation is that comparison groups are not always used. Therefore, there is no comparison of data between children who completed the group versus children who did not complete the group. This makes it difficult to determine with any certainty whether changes in attitudes and behaviour can be attributed to the group itself or to the lapse of time. A third limitation is that the children who are in the group may not reflect the true diversity in the population and therefore, the generalizability of results is limited to that particular sample. Finally, some of the questionnaires were developed by the researchers and were not tested for reliability or validity. Therefore, the results and interpretations based on that information may not accurately reflect what the researchers were trying to measure.

Summary

This literature review has described the adjustment problems that characterize some children who experience divorce and small group interventions that have been designed to address these issues. The evaluation of small group interventions in the literature has been mixed. However, many have highlighted the benefits and positive outcomes that have been found in children who participate in these groups. As well, this format of intervention continues to be commonly used with this population.

The group model that was developed in this practicum incorporated the best practice issues that have been highlighted in the literature (i.e., support, education, and skill-building). The content of the group addressed the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural difficulties that children experience. It also addressed the protective factors that help children adjust to divorce, including social support and the development of effective coping skills. The inclusion of a component to work with parents more directly before and after the group helped to address the environmental variables that affect children's adjustment.

The programs that are described and evaluated in the literature (specifically those that influenced the development of the current program) are offered on a more long-term basis (i.e., more than two sessions). Although research on these programs does not specify whether a particular number of sessions is more effective than another, in order to address the components described above, eight sessions were developed for this practicum. The design of the intervention will be discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Chapter Three: Implementation and Evaluation Design

Setting

This practicum was implemented under the sponsorship of Family Conciliation in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This agency works with families experiencing separation and divorce, providing parent education programs, parent mediation, groups for children, and court ordered assessments on custody and visitation arrangements. This agency has close ties with families experiencing divorce and separation through its connection with the Department of Justice. The agency staff have an abundance of knowledge and experience in the issues, problems, and challenges that divorce and separation have on families. This agency allowed me to access the population of children who were the target of this practicum. There were also staff members who could act in a supervisory capacity and as a resource for questions or concerns that arose. This agency is kept up-to-date on changes to laws or policies in the area of divorce and separation, which is important for accurately understanding the experiences of the target population.

The actual group sessions were held at Mediation Services in Winnipeg. The space available at the Family Conciliation office was deemed to be less conducive to the main goals of the group. For example, there was not one room that was best suited to holding the group, so the children would have to move from room to room depending on the type of activity the were doing. In terms of the set-up of the Family Conciliation offices, this meant walking past parents who may be seated in the waiting room while their child attended the group. This may interfere with the children's sense of privacy and having their own space within the group. Logistical factors also played a role in deciding to have the group sessions occur in a different setting. For example, security issues had to

be implemented in order to allow people to enter the building after-hours, due to the fact that it is locked after regular business hours. This required resources that were not available.

The space at Mediation Services allowed the children to remain in the same room for each session and for each activity. This helped maintain the consistency of the sessions and may have helped with the children's sense of having a place of their own. As well, the room was not in viewing distance for parents who were waiting. This may have helped to create a more private atmosphere for the children.

Participant Selection

Recruitment

Children were recruited from two main sources. One source was parents who were involved in the programs of the agency (i.e., parent education or mediation). Parents were given a letter outlining the nature of the practicum and intervention (see Appendix A) and were asked to provide their name and phone number if they were interested in being contacted about their children's participation.

The second source of recruiting children was through the families who were referred to the agency or already on a waiting list for a children's program. I contacted these parents by phone to give them the same information contained in the letter about the practicum.

For parents who were interested in having their child participate pre-screening interviews were set up with parents and children. The custody arrangement was determined and if parental responsibility was shared between parents (joint custody) I informed the parent that I would be contacting the other parent to meet with them and

obtain their consent. If one parent had primary parental responsibility (sole custody), I informed the parent that I would be sending a letter to the other parent informing them of the child's participation in the program (see Appendix B).

Selection Criteria

The intervention was designed to be preventative and target children early on in the separation process. The children who participated in this intervention were identified by parents as exhibiting emotional or behavioural difficulties (as described in the literature review) at home or school following this family transition. Children were included in the intervention if they (a) had experienced parental separation within 2 years prior to the beginning of the group, (b) were between the ages of 9 and 12, and (c) had written parental consent to participate in the group.

The rationale for these criteria was based on the literature. First, behavioural and emotional difficulties have been found to occur within the first 2 years after separation. This time period has been identified as a period of high vulnerability for families of separation and divorce (Brown, Portes, & Christensen, 1989; Grych & Fincham, 1997; O'Halloran & Carr, 2000). Therefore, this practicum was designed to address this time period in the target population. It was understood that there may be differences between children even within this time frame. For example, children whose parents have separated in the past month will be at a different place compared to those whose parents separated 18 months ago. However, it was suggested in the literature that having children at various stages in adjustment can be helpful for the group (Farmer & Galaris, 1993). For example, children whose situation is more recent may benefit by seeing another child who has made progress in overcoming the problems they are currently experiencing. Children

whose adjustment is farther along can serve as a role model and gain a sense of competence in being able to help other children. As well, it is the separation of the parents (regardless of whether a legal divorce has occurred) that is stressful for children. Therefore, parents did not have to be legally divorced in order for their child to participate in the group.

This age group was identified as benefiting from the group experience because of the abilities that characterize their developmental stage (Hodges, 1991). For example, children in this age group are not as egocentric as younger children which allows them to be able to recognize similarities and differences between themselves and other children. This can help them to relate to other children and develop a supportive network (Hodges, 1991). As well, the majority of programs evaluated in the literature were with children in this age group, including the program models that guided the development of this practicum intervention.

Children were excluded from participating if, based on information obtained from parents, it was believed that the format of this intervention and/or the content would not be beneficial or suitable for them given their situation. Situations that were taken into consideration for excluding a child from participating were if (a) there was a history of serious family violence in the home prior to the separation, (b) they were diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), (c) they had exhibited behaviour difficulties in group settings, or (d) their sibling was already participating in the group.

Children who have experienced direct or indirect family violence (e.g., physical or sexual abuse) throughout their lives often have different experiences and outcomes than children who have not experienced family violence or have only experienced high levels

of conflict in the context of the separation. A treatment group model has been established for children who have experienced both parental separation and family violence (e.g., Johnston & Roseby, 1998). This model differs from the model used in this practicum in terms of the content and issues addressed with the children. An attempt was made to determine whether or not a child had been traumatized by family violence and whether that child was experiencing more severe problems than the program is designed to address. It was understood that it may not be possible to verify whether or not a child had actually experienced physical or sexual abuse.

This intervention was designed based on models that are intended to help children who are not experiencing severe behavioural problems (Cowen, 1996; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985; Stolberg & Mahler, 1994). An example of this could be ADHD. The small group intervention may not be able to address the specific needs of children with severe behavioural problems, nor would it be beneficial for the group to have one member who is not able to fully participate in the activities.

Finally, although the literature has suggested that having siblings in the same group may or may not be helpful, it was decided (based on Family Conciliation's practice with children's groups) to exclude siblings from the same group. Children may not feel as comfortable being completely open and honest about their feelings if their sibling is present. It was felt that this may limit the benefits that they would receive from the group experience because the ability to express feelings about their family and home situation is an important aspect of the group.

Families were considered on an individual basis and there was some flexibility used in applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This was done to allow for the

recruitment of a sufficient number of children to be able to run the groups. For example, one child was diagnosed with ADHD, but was being given medication that the parent believed helped to decrease the symptoms. Therefore, this child was included in the group.

Some children were excluded based on information obtained by parents over the phone without needing to set up a pre-screening interview. For example, one family was excluded because there was a history of sexual abuse experienced by the child. Three families were excluded because inclusion criteria were not met (i.e., one family wanted both children in the same group, two families indicated that the other parent was not willing to provide consent). Five families were put onto a waiting list as there was no more space available. All children who participated in a pre-screening interview were included in the group.

If a child was deemed to be better suited to another type of intervention (i.e., the family where sexual abuse had been an issue), information about other programs and resources in the community was given to parents (see Appendix C). The resources listed in Appendix C are not an exhaustive list and additional resources were provided when necessary. If parents contacted me after the size limit had been reached for the groups or their child was outside the age range, the child was put onto a waiting list and referred to similar programs being run in the community or to their school guidance counsellors.

Intervention

Pre-Screening Interview

Parents (individually) and children were invited to come to Family Conciliation to meet with me. If a parent was not able to come to Family Conciliation, I would meet with

them at their home. This interview was used to gather information about the child and their family history as well as collect pre-group data for the evaluation component. In each parent-child interview, I met with the parent individually first, asked them specific questions (see Appendix D) and obtained written consent (see Appendix E). I then met with the child individually to explain the group and answer any questions he or she had (see Appendix F). Children were also asked if they wanted to participate in the group or at least give it a try. Because it was redundant for each parent to bring the child, only one parent did so and the other parent was interviewed on his or her own.

During this interview, both the parent and child were informed about confidentiality issues (i.e., that information collected during the interview was confidential with the exception of information I was required to report by law if disclosed in the interview). As well, the parent and child were told about the confidentiality of the group (i.e., that specific information discussed by the child will not be shared with the parent, with exceptions). However, the parent would be given general information about what occurred in each session and general information about how their child was doing.

If written consent was not obtained from a parent, the child would not participate in the group. If parents had shared parenting responsibility for the children ("joint custody"), written consent was obtained from both parents. If the arrangement was such that one parent has primary parenting responsibility ("sole custody"), written consent was obtained from that parent and the other parent received an informational letter (see Appendix B) outlining the nature of the practicum and intervention and informing them that consent has been obtained for their child to participate in the group. This parent was invited to arrange a meeting with me if he or she required more information or had any

questions. There were three families in total where primary parenting responsibility was with one parent. I was contacted by the other parent for more information in two of these families.

Record Keeping

Confidentiality policies that are in place at Family Conciliation were adhered to with regard to the storage and release of information about clients at the agency. A file was kept on the family of each child participant. This file contained the agency intake form, the signed consent forms, and my notes regarding the child or family. All data collected from parents and children during interviews and on measures was kept in a separate file and coded by number to correspond with each family. This information was used for data analysis and evaluation purposes.

Supervision Methods

A dual supervision model was used in which the supervision duties were shared between both on-site and faculty supervisors. One to one meetings occurred for supervision purposes and these were held periodically throughout the practicum.

Meetings with my faculty advisor occurred most frequently at the beginning and end of the implementation of each group. Progress meetings occurred less frequently mid-group. The purpose of these meetings was to answer any questions I had about issues arising during the groups or in the planning or evaluation of the groups. We also discussed how my learning goals were being fulfilled. As well, feedback was obtained from the other member of my advisory committee when needed.

Telephone meetings occurred with my on-site supervisor at Family Conciliation following each group session. This was to discuss any problems or issues that arose

during each session and problem-solving to work through how to deal with these issues

for the next group. These telephone meetings were more frequent during the fall 2003

group and occurred periodically during the winter 2004 if any specific problems or issues

needed to be discussed.

Contact was maintained on a weekly basis with all advisory committee members

through the written report I completed following each session. This report was emailed to

the committee, along with any questions or areas of concern arising from the group

session. Feedback was provided by email in these cases.

Pragmatic Details of the Intervention

Each group met every Tuesday evening for 8 weeks. This length was chosen

based on a review of the average number of sessions and the duration of each session

offered by existing programs. Two groups were run in this practicum; Group One took

place in the fall of 2003 and Group Two took place in the winter of 2004. The reason that

groups were not run concurrently was because the evaluation information obtained from

the first group was deemed to be beneficial for making modifications to the second group.

Each group was co-facilitated, as most programs recommend that two facilitators are

necessary (Saskatchewan Justice, 1999). The co-facilitator was a student doing a BSW

placement at Family Conciliation.

Description of the Intervention

The content of the sessions was based on topics that have been identified in the

literature as important for children in this family transition. The structure of the program

included the best practice components described in the literature review. One important

aspect of this program was to include parents in some way, as it was described earlier that

parental behaviour plays an important role in children's adjustment. Therefore, meetings took place with parents prior to and following the group to transfer information to parents that may be helpful for their understanding of how their child is doing, what behaviours they may be noticing at home based on what was learned in the group, and how they can help facilitate positive experiences for the child outside the group setting.

The main components of the intervention involved providing information and support to the children, allowing them to discuss their feelings, and learning and practicing of skills. The sessions had a similar general structure with the content of each session focusing on a particular topic. This structure involved a check-in activity at the beginning, a group discussion and activities around the topic, a break, further discussion and activities, and a check-out activity at the end.

An important implementation component of this practicum was the development of a detailed program. The following section outlines the goals identified for each session.

Session	Goal
1	Children get to know other participants and facilitators; develop a sense of comfort with the group; share expectations for group.
2	Help children understand what a family is; talk about changes that occur during separation or divorce.
3	Help children learn positive ways to deal with changes and feelings experienced in divorce; help children learn constructive communication skills.

4	Help children learn ways to constructively solve problems and recognize when problems are in their control and when they are not.
5	Review problem-solving and communication skills; learn constructive ways to express and manage angry feelings.
6	Help children understand legal terms used in divorce and separation; develop a sense of competence in their knowledge and expertise on divorce.
7	Help children feel better about themselves; enhance self-esteem; recognize positive qualities of themselves, their families; discuss positive changes in separation.
8	Help the children come to closure with the group ending; learn what they can do after the group for social support.

The activities that were used in each group corresponded with the goal and topic for each session. Many of the activities and strategies that were used in this intervention are from cognitive-behavioural interventions. For example, teaching communication skills and problem-solving skills is used in this form of therapy. Cognitive-behavioural interventions also teach "interpersonal coping skills" which covers a broad area of behaviours (Zarb, 1992, p. 59). For the purpose of this intervention, anger management skills were taught to children following the same principles used by Zarb. Role-playing and modelling are other strategies identified as part of cognitive-behavioural therapy that were used in this practicum as well (Ronen, 1997; Zarb, 1992). For example, the facilitators modelled "I messages" when expressing satisfaction or disappointment with

children's behaviours. Children were also given the opportunity to role-play using "I messages" in hypothetical situations. The use of relaxation skills, visualization, and self-talk are components of cognitive-behavioural therapy which were also activities used this intervention (Ronen, 1997; Zarb, 1992). One other aspect of cognitive-behavioural therapy suggested by Kendall (1993) is incorporating people who play important roles in the client's life in the intervention. This was also an aspect of this children's group through meeting with parents prior to and following the group to discuss what was taught to children and how parents can help to facilitate or acknowledge these new behaviours at home.

Activities were compiled from various resources and existing programs (as referenced below). Where noted, specific activities are elaborated on in the Appendix section. The following section outlines the activities used in the first group.

Group One (fall 2003)

Session Title	Session Activities
1: Introduction	• Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce scale (CBAPS) administered (Kurdek & Berg, 1987) • Name tags (Pomrenke, 1996) • Group discussion • Activity- "All About Me" (adapted from Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985a) (see Appendix G)
2: Families and Changes	• Group discussion on families (Saskatchewan, 1999) • Activity: Things in common/ different (Saskatchewan, 1999)

session 2 continued	• Activity: Circle of knowledge (Saskatchewan, 1999) • Activity: Worksheet on changes (Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985a)
3: Feelings and Communication	• Group discussion: Grief process (Pomrenke, 1996; Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985a) • Activity: Hypothetical scenarios about feelings (Saskatchewan, 1999) • Activity: "I messages" • Activity: Hypothetical scenarios using "I messages" (adapted from Saskatchewan, 1999)
4: Problem-Solving	• Video: "Children in the Middle," part 3, "I messages" (Center for Divorce Education, 1994) • Activity: 6-step problem-solving model (Stolberg & Gourley, 1996) • Activity: "Butterflies in my Stomach" (Lowenstein, 2002)
5: Review and Anger Management	• "Personal weather report" (Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985a) • Group discussion: Review of previous sessions • Activity: "The chit-chat game" (Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985b) • Activity: Visualization/relaxation exercise (Pomrenke, 1996) • Group discussion: Anger management (Pomrenke, 1996)

session 5 continued	• Activity: Hypothetical scenarios for dealing with anger (adapted from Saskatchewan, 1999)
	• Activity: Worksheet on angry feelings (see Appendix H)
6: Legal Terms and Review	• Personal weather report (Calgary Counselling Centre)
	• Video: "Children in the Middle," parts 1 and 2, feelings; truths and myths about divorce (Center for Divorce Education, 1994)
	• Activity: Write letter as a group to parents (B. L. Bacon, personal communication, September, 2003)
	• Activity: Circle of knowledge and worksheet (Saskatchewan, 1999)
7: Self-Esteem	• Make new name-tags (D. Mills, personal communication, October, 2000)
	• Group discussion on self-esteem (Pomrenke, 1996)
	• Activity: Make a "warm-fuzzy" craft (Pomrenke, 1996)
	• Activity: "Smiley Faces Game" (Lowenstein, 2002)
	• Group activity (Pomrenke, 1996)
8: Closure	• CBAPS scale, evaluation form (see Appendix I) administered
	• Pizza supper & certificates
	• Group discussion: Social support (Pomrenke, 1996)
	• Activity: Advice to other kids, worksheet (Pomrenke, 1996)

Some activities that were initially tried in the first group were altered or removed for the second group based on responses from group members. The outline below for Group Two identifies only those specific modifications that were made from Group One. For example, Group One was not receptive to closing circles at the end of the session. Therefore, these were not incorporated. Group Two, however, was very receptive to closing circles and this component was added to that group. Another general difference was that sessions 6 and 7 were completed in the reverse order for Group Two. This was because one child was going to be away for session 7 (Self-Esteem) and I wanted all children to be there for that particular session.

Group Two (winter 2004)

Session Title	Session Activities (variations from Group One)
1: Introduction	• Hare Self-Esteem scale (HSE) (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000) administered as well as CBAPS
2: Families and Changes	• Check-out using "How do I feel?" (Saskatchewan, 1999) (this was added to all sessions)
3: Feelings and Communication	• Role plays using "I messages" (replaces hypothetical scenarios)
4: Problem-solving	• Same as Group One
5: Review and Anger Management	• Did not complete "Chit-chat game" or anger worksheet

6: Self-Esteem	• Activity "self-esteem bowl" replaces "warm fuzzy" (adapted from Pomrenke, 1996)
7: Legal Terms	• Added "Chit-chat game"
8: Closure	• HSE was completed (instead of CBAPS in Group One)

Termination Issues

This intervention was a time-limited group, therefore, the group had a specific ending date. Based on my observations about how the children were in the group as well as through group discussions, I made an assessment about each child's adjustment and coping with the separation. Following the end of the group, I met with each parent individually to discuss any concerns with regard to how their child was doing. Through this discussion, referral information was given to the parent about resources, agencies, or programs that can be of use to the child and/or family.

Evaluation of the Intervention

The children's group that was developed in this practicum was designed based on the cognitive-behavioural goals described in the literature review. Because the literature identified that children whose parents have separated may experience distorted or inaccurate cognitions, one purpose of this intervention was to challenge these inaccurate beliefs and help the children to develop a more accurate understanding of their family situation. In addition to improving children's beliefs about their family, this intervention was aimed at helping children develop a more positive perception of themselves (i.e., their self-esteem). It was assumed that if children can have more positive views of themselves and their family, this will lead to a change in their behaviour. However, this

intervention also had a strong skill-building component (i.e., behavioural). This involved teaching children various behavioural strategies to help them deal with situations they may encounter at home or with peers.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for this practicum were based on evaluation outcomes of similar programs described in the literature as well as those expected from cognitive-behavioural interventions. One area of improvement was expected in children's general ability to adapt to and cope with their parents' separation. It was assumed that this would be achieved through an improvement in their emotional well-being and behavioural competence. Specifically, children's beliefs about themselves (i.e., self-esteem and self-concept) and about the divorce were expected to improve. Behavioural improvements were expected to take the form of improved expression of feelings (i.e., communication skills), decreased aggressive or acting-out behaviour, and improved social competence. The structure and content of this intervention were designed to lead to these outcomes.

Social support is thought to play a role in people's ability to cope with negative life events (Snyder et al., 1987). Social support was an ongoing aspect of the group. The group helped the children to develop a supportive network of peers and provided a place to discuss their feelings and hear other children's experiences. The support component was expected to help decrease the children's feelings of loneliness and isolation, normalize the experience, and increase their feelings of social competence. The opportunity also existed for children to help others deal with certain situations, which can help to improve their sense of self-competence. Improvements in social competence may

occur within the group initially, but eventually could transfer to situations outside the group.

The information taught to the children about the divorce was intended to help them develop an accurate understanding, clarify misconceptions, and decrease their sense of responsibility. Inaccurate beliefs and perceptions were challenged. Children were helped to realize that they cannot change the situation, but they can change how they see the situation. This was expected to help improve children's self-esteem and decrease their sense of helplessness (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988), which in turn, can help their coping ability. This educational component was incorporated throughout the sessions.

The skill-building component was expected to directly address the behavioural issues children face, which was thought to supplement the positive changes experienced in the group in general. Children were expected to learn how to more effectively communicate their feelings, express their anger, and solve problems that arise. Learning specific coping strategies has been identified as a way to help children develop social competence, a sense of self-efficacy, and help them adjust to the divorce (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Zarb, 1992). The skills developed and practiced in the group were expected to transfer to situations outside the group. The skill-building components occurred near the middle to end of the group.

To summarize, the support received through the program combined with a better understanding of the situation can help increase children's emotional well-being. This can begin to help them with behavioural issues. The behavioural aspect was further addressed through learning specific skills to help them cope behaviourally with various situations.

Once children learn how they can change their behaviour to effectively deal with problems or situations in their lives, this will further build on their self-esteem and sense of social competence. In terms of a timeline for expected changes to occur, an improved understanding of divorce was expected to occur during the intervention. However, as Hodges (1991) notes, the ability to practice and become comfortable with using the skills takes time. Therefore, the behavioural changes (e.g., social skills, acting-out, expressing feelings) may not be noticeable immediately after the program but may appear later on.

Objectives and Target Variables

Based on these expected outcomes, the following variables were measured in the evaluation; (a) children's beliefs about themselves (self-esteem), (b) children's beliefs about the divorce (level of understanding), and (c) behavioural changes (acting-out/aggressive behaviour, communication of feelings, social skills). The program logic model (below) summarizes the objectives and expected outcomes for this practicum.

Program Logic Model

Problem: Children experiencing problems in adjusting to/coping with their parents' separation.

Goal: To help children cope with their parents' separation through providing accurate information, emotional and social support, and coping strategies.

Objective 1: To help children accurately understand the divorce and change any inaccurate cognitions or beliefs they may have about their parents' separation.

Methods: Learning about families, definitions of a family

Learning about common, but inaccurate beliefs

Learning legal terms

Discussing common changes and feelings in the divorce process

Outcome: Increased understanding of separation (immediate)

Decreased self-blame for separation (immediate)

Improved self-esteem and feelings about their family situation (intermediate)

Evaluation: Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale

Facilitator observation in session discussions and activities

Objective 2: To give children a sense of social and emotional support within the group. Allow them to recognize that there are other children in a similar situation. Provide a place for talking with others about their thoughts and feelings.

Methods: Opportunity in each session to share feelings in the larger group and in smaller groups with other children

Self-esteem, self-competence activities

Group cohesiveness activities (e.g., break time)

Outcome: Decreased sense of isolation/increased peer interaction in group (immediate)

Increased expression of feelings (immediate)

Decreased self-blame (immediate)

Improved self-esteem and feelings about their family situation (intermediate)

Evaluation: Facilitator observation in session discussion and activities

Post-group evaluation form questions

Post-group interview questions

Hare Self-Esteem Scale

Objective 3: To teach children specific strategies for dealing with problems or situations they may encounter in this family transition as well as ways for constructively expressing their emotions (i.e., anger) and communicating with others.

Methods: Coping with changes and feelings

>Problem-solving strategies, social skills

>Communication skills, "I messages," expressing feelings

>Anger management skills

>Role plays/ "what could that child do" scenarios

Outcome: Increased understanding of alternate ways of behaving and interacting (immediate)

>Improved confidence in ability to handle difficult situations (intermediate)

>Increased use of positive/constructive behaviours (long-term)

>Improved sense of self-competence, self-esteem (long-term)

Evaluation: Post-group parent interviews about behavioural changes

>Post-group child evaluation form and interview

>Facilitator observation in session discussions and activities

Objective 4: To help facilitate positive group outcomes within the child's home environment.

Methods: Discussion of external social supports

>Share with parents "Letter to Parents" written collectively by children

>Meet with parents to discuss what children learned, inform parents about their role in helping child

Outcome: Use of skills and knowledge outside group setting (long-term)

Evaluation: Follow-up parent interview

Overall Outcome

Children will have improved adjustment to parental separation through improved

behavioural and emotional adjustment and improved self-esteem and self-competence.

Methodology

Design

The design of this evaluation and the measures used were based on the evaluation

methodology used in the literature on group interventions for children of divorce. This

included data collection pre-program, post-program, and follow-up. During the

pre-screening interview, qualitative data were collected from parents and quantitative data

were collected from children. Quantitative data were also collected from the children at

the initial group session. This constitutes the pre-group information and was used for

comparison purposes with post-group information.

Following the program, qualitative and quantitative data were collected from

children, parents, and myself. Parents were interviewed to obtain qualitative information

about improvements or changes in their child's behaviour. This information was

compared to information collected prior to the program. Following the group, the

children completed quantitative measures and were interviewed to supplement this with

qualitative information. Finally, I completed detailed observation notes as the facilitator.

These notes were analyzed following the group.

The purpose of this practicum was to examine group change in specific target

areas. Because two groups were run at separate times, this allowed not only an evaluation

of group change, but a comparison between groups. Therefore, the design was for each group to be evaluated separately with the groups being compared on the measures over time. However, there were many similarities between groups (i.e., same structure, same facilitator, similar activities, similar presenting issues); thus some aspects of the evaluation involved combining the groups into one sample.

Research Measures

Qualitative data were obtained through measures I designed and a form adapted from an existing program. Quantitative data were collected through standardized measures.

Pre-group. In the pre-screening interview, parents were asked to report on any concerns they felt the child was experiencing following the divorce. This was an opportunity to assess for the types of emotional or behavioural problems that are identified in the literature as being characteristic of some children of divorce. Some parents also identified concerns they had in other areas (e.g., issues with step-families). This information was helpful for me to ensure I was including information or topics that were relevant to the individual children in the group.

During the children's pre-group interview, they completed the Hare Self-Esteem scale (HSE) to measure self-esteem, which was one of the variables targeted in this practicum. It has good test-retest reliability and high concurrent validity (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000). These scores were compared with post-group scores to look for changes in the expected direction.

At the first group session, children completed a second scale, Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce scale (CBAPS). The CBAPS has been shown to have good

internal consistency reliability and fair concurrent validity (Kurdek & Berg, 1987). As described earlier, children's cognitions about divorce play an important role in their adjustment. This measure was intended to help me understand each child's beliefs about the separation. The results also provided useful information in making modifications to the program content, particularly on the topics that were found to be common beliefs of children in the group. This scale was used for comparison purposes post-group to see if children's cognitions about the divorce changed as expected.

The standardized measures that were used in this evaluation were designed for children in the same age range as the children in the groups. As well, these measures have good test-retest reliability, which is important for the design of this evaluation. These scales were also selected because they measure the target variables of this evaluation. Standardized measures were chosen for these variables because the concepts they represent are internal to the child and not easily observable by others (i.e., parents, group facilitators). As well, children may not be able to verbalize their beliefs about themselves or the divorce in an accurate way. The use of standardized measures will provide a concrete measure of these aspects of children's cognitions. As well, this can provide for normative comparisons if one was to have larger numbers.

Post-group. At the last group session, the children completed the CBAPS again. As well, children completed a post-group evaluation form that addressed their experience within the group (see Appendix I). Children were interviewed following the termination of the group to obtain qualitative information about their group experience in relation to expected outcomes (see Appendix J). At this interview, they also completed the HSE again.

Parents were also interviewed following the program to obtain information about whether the child has shown improvement (over the course of the group intervention) in the areas identified as problematic prior to the program or in expected behavioural areas (see Appendix K). Parents were asked for any feedback on whether they felt the group was beneficial for their child. In addition to information obtained from parents and children, I used my own observations from group sessions to assess whether children showed changes in expected areas.

Follow-up. Parents were contacted approximately one month following the post-group interview. The time frame was selected partially based on a review of follow-up times used in the literature as well as what was realistic within this practicum timeline. The purpose of the follow-up contact was to see if changes reported post-program had been maintained or if new changes have occurred that had not occurred earlier (see Appendix L). As described earlier, some behavioural changes have been found to appear after the group has been completed and the children have had the opportunity to practice their skills.

Special Considerations

The issue of children withdrawing from the group was also considered in terms of how the data would be included in the evaluation and analysis. One child dropped out of Group One after completing two sessions, one child dropped out of Group Two after completing two sessions, and one child completed pre-group measures but withdrew before Group Two began. The evaluative information collected from the children who dropped out of the group part way through was used for some data analysis in terms of pre-group information. As well, their information was also assessed to see if there were

any characteristics that stood apart from the children who remained in the group that may

explain why these children did not complete the group. For the third child who did not

attend any group sessions, his pre-group data was used as part of the comparison group

data analysis (as explained further in the next chapter).

Learning Goal Evaluation

Some of the measures used in this practicum for collecting information were used

as part of an assessment of how my learning goals were achieved. For example, on the

post-group evaluation form and in the interview, certain questions were built in to assess

some of the specific learning goals identified earlier. The children's responses to these

questions helped to understand the extent to which these goals were attained during the

group. In addition to children's reports, my own observations of the group sessions were

recorded in detail to examine children's behaviours, observed changes, and group

process. Careful review and reflection of each group session and the changes observed

throughout the group were also used as a way to assess my ability to recognize different

aspects of group process and respond to that in how the group sessions were facilitated.

Limitations to Data Collection and Evaluation Methodology

One limitation is that there was no comparison group of children from the same

population who did not receive the intervention. An attempt was made to address this

through having the children recruited for the second group complete one scale at two

pre-group times (at their pre-screening interview and at the first session in January/04).

This data was used as a comparison with the data from Group One's children to see if

there was a difference on the scores for these two groups over the time period where one

group was receiving the intervention and one was not. However, this was the only

measure used for comparison purposes. This aspect could have been strengthened through having all pre-group measures (i.e., CBAPS, parent pre-group interviews) completed at two pre-group times for Group Two.

A second limitation is that the results are not necessarily generalizable to the whole population of children of divorce. This sample was chosen from parents who had taken active steps to participate in parent education programs and mediation and/or to seek help for their children. This sample may not be representative of all families, especially families where parents are in such high conflict that they are not behaving in the best interest of their children. An attempt was made to determine the level of conflict between parents prior to and following the group, which was helpful in determining whether there were parents who may be in high conflict situations.

Third, because follow-up was only conducted at one point in time and within a relatively short time period, it limits the ability to conclude with any certainty whether changes were enduring or whether changes that did not appear post-group or at follow-up occurred for children after a longer time lapse. A longer follow-up period (e.g., three to six months) and more follow-up interviews may have provided a better picture of actual changes.

Quantitative and qualitative data. A limitation pertaining to the quantitative data was that the standardized measures were filled out by the children themselves. The potential existed for social desirability to bias the responses or children may have been responding according to what they think is the "right" answer. As well, because scales were filled out twice, children may have recalled their previous answers and responded based on that knowledge.

A second limitation was that this was a very small sample. In order to obtain statistically significant findings with such a small sample, the magnitude of change, using a group comparison method, would have to be quite large. Therefore, it was difficult know whether smaller changes did occur but were not able to be detected by the statistical tests used in the evaluation. As part of the learning experience, parametric tests were used for analysis. Use of a more liberal probability level combined with use of visual analysis of the raw data may have helped to decrease the effect of this limitation. However, this limitation could also have been reduced by using a non-parametric test for the evaluation of change.

A final limitation to the quantitative data was the use of the HSE to measure change in self-esteem. It is possible that this measure may not be able to detect changes over a short period of time in between each completion of the scale. Self-esteem is a broad concept and not necessarily a trait that changes in an enduring way over a short period of time. Use of this scale alone to determine if change occurred on this variable may not lead to expected outcomes. Therefore, information collected by parents as well as my observations of children in the group helped to supplement the outcomes obtained on this measure.

There are two limitations in terms of the qualitative data. First, because this information was obtained by me (the facilitator), the parents or children may not have answered honestly to avoid criticizing my project or abilities. An attempt to alleviate this with the children occurred through having them complete an anonymous questionnaire at the last group session covering similar information. A second limitation was that because parents were aware that their child participated in the intervention, the information

provided post-group and at follow-up may have reflected changes that they thought had occurred that in actuality had not. These are points that can affect the reliability and validity of the evaluation information gathered and were considered when interpreting the findings.

Learning goals. There was one main limitation to the evaluation of my learning goals. This was that self-reports were the main method used to assess the goals. For example, children's self-reports and my own reports (based on my observation of the group sessions) were used. In terms of the children's reports, these are not necessarily an accurate reflection of whether or not they actually gained knowledge, learned skills, or felt a sense of cohesiveness in the group. Children may not understand or be able to reflect on these issues and may have answered "yes or no," regardless of whether they did or did not learn anything from the group experience or felt supported by the other children. This is why some activities were built into the design of the group that assessed some of these aspects without directly asking children to verbalize their experience. In terms of my own reports following the groups, it is possible that my own biases may have influenced what behaviours were or were not observed. Therefore, these limitations were considered when determining the extent to which the learning goals were met in this practicum. The following chapter will present the results and interpretation of the data collection.

Chapter Four: Results of the Evaluation

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

Two quantitative measures were used: (a) Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce scale (CBAPS) (Kurdek & Berg, 1987) and (b) Hare Self-Esteem scale (HSE) (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000). These measures were analyzed using a paired *t*-test. Some literature has suggested that the *t*-test can be used with small samples (e.g., Downie & Heath, 1970), which is what this practicum involved (e.g., n = 12). However, these authors indicate that caution should be used with sample sizes of less that 30. The *t*-test was chosen for this practicum for the researcher to gain experience using this statistical measure as a way to determine whether this test may or may not be useful for a comparison of groups of such a small size. The outcome of this decision (i.e., whether it was a useful test) will be discussed later.

Pre-group and post-group scores were compared for children in each group. The analysis determined whether the difference in means from pre- to post-group (for each group) was significantly different (Foster, 1998). Due to small sample sizes a more liberal probability statistic of 0.10 was used to prevent a Type 2 error (i.e., that a statistical difference that does exist is not detected) from occurring. On the HSE, a total score was derived for each child. It was expected that post-group scores would be higher than pre-group scores on this measure, indicating higher self-esteem at post-group. On the CBAPS, children who answered positively to questions representing a problematic belief were given a lower score. Therefore, it was expected on this measure that scores would be

higher following the group, indicating fewer problematic beliefs. A visual representation of pre-post scores on these measures was also used to look for a trend in scores in the expected direction.

Qualitative Data

There were three main sources of qualitative data; (a) parent interview information, (b) facilitator observations, and (c) children's post-group information.

Parent interview information. Interview data collected from parents at pre-group, post-group, and follow-up was coded and analyzed using a modified version of content analysis (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Prior to the group, parents were asked what they wanted their child to gain from the group or what they wanted the group to help their child with. The responses were assumed to be areas of concern for parents, prompting their interest in having their child participate in a program. The responses were coded into the main categories of concern.

Post-group data was collected approximately one week after the group ended and follow-up data was collected approximately one month after that meeting. The questions asked at these times were a follow up to the pre-group questions, to determine if parents had noticed any significant changes in the areas identified prior to the group. Parent responses following the group were also coded into categories and compared to pre-group categories for changes in expected areas. These categories were: (a) behavioural (e.g., anger, aggressive behaviour, communication skills); (b) beliefs (e.g., parental blame, self-blame, loyalty conflicts, worry about one parent, worry about making adult decisions, general understanding of the separation, normalizing the experience/decreasing

isolation, social support); and (c) self-esteem (e.g., this was identified as being low by the parent).

At the follow-up time, a question was added to allow parents to identify any new issues that they had noticed at that point. For Group One, only one parent indicated a new issue and it was not new to the original categories, but new for that particular child. For Group Two, two parents indicated a new issue at follow-up, which were already a category from post-group, but was new for those children.

Nine parents from Group One were interviewed at pre-group. For the six children who began this group, three of the children only had one parent participate in an interview. Two of the initial nine parents did not complete a post-group interview (due to their child withdrawing from the group). Therefore, only seven parents were included in the pre-group analysis (n = 7). There were two parents (who did not complete a pre-group interview) who contacted me during the group to indicate their interest in participating in an interview at the conclusion of the group. Their data was included in the post-group analysis (n = 9). At post-group, of the five children who remained in the program until the end, one of the children only had one parent's interview data. At follow-up, five of the original pre-group parents plus one parent from post-group provided information (n = 6).

For Group Two, 14 parents were interviewed at pre-group. For two of the eight children only one parent contributed pre-group information. However, only 13 parents were included in the pre-group analysis as one child withdrew from the group (n = 13). At post-group, information was collected from 11 parents and used in the analysis

(n = 11). Of the seven children who remained in the group until the end, three children had only one parent participate in a post-group interview. Of these 11 parents, 10 of them provided follow-up information (n = 10)

Also included in parent data analysis were questions pertaining to circumstances in the child's life that may have had an effect on how the child was coping with their family situation. This information was also coded into categories to determine the main issues that may have been a factor in the children's lives at the time of the group. There were three main categories of factors; (a) level of parental conflict (as rated on a scale of 1 to 10 by the parent), (b) participation in other interventions (either the child or parents), and (c) changes in the family situation (e.g., health of family members, new family members, loss of family members). For Group Two, some new issues were identified and a category of "miscellaneous" was added for this group only. All information pertaining to external factors was included in the analysis as possible explanations for outcomes found in individual children at post-group.

Facilitator observations. Following each session, I recorded detailed notes on my observations of the children's behaviour within the group based on the target variables being measured (see Appendix M). Following the group, these observation notes were analyzed using a modified version of content analysis to identify examples of behaviour that was consistent with or opposite to the expected outcomes each target variable.

Child post-group information. Children completed an anonymous evaluation form at the last group session (see Appendix I). Certain questions on this form were matched with target variables. Children were also interviewed individually following the group and questions that were asked were also matched with variables (see Appendix J).

Children's responses to these post-group questions were quantified and described as a measure of children's outcome on the variables.

Demographic Information

Most children who participated in the two groups were interviewed prior to the first group (with the exception of three children who participated in the second group). This was done in order to combine children with similar backgrounds for each group. Demographic information for Group One is presented in Table 1. The children were close in age and all parents had been married prior to the separation (with missing data from one family on that variable). The time since separation varied, but was within 2 years for all children at the start of the group. Half of the children were only-children and half had siblings. Only one child had any step-family relations but he was included with this group because of his age.

There were some differences in the demographic information for children in Group Two, as summarized in Table 2. The average age of the children was slightly lower than for Group One, however, this number is slightly inflated due to one child being 12 years old. As with Group One, there was a range in the time since separation for the children, however, all families had been separated approximately 2 years prior to the group. Differences between the two groups included the following; some parents of Group Two children had been living common-law (this was not the case for Group One parents), and half of the children in Group Two had step-family members in their lives (versus only one child from Group One).

Table 1: *Demographic Information (Group One)*

Family	Age of child	Siblings	Time since separation[a]	Marital status/time[b]	Custody arrangement
1	10	1	9	M/12	sole
2	10	0	24	missing	sole
3	11	0	11	M/18	joint
4	10	1	2	M/12	joint
5	11	0	18	M/12	joint
6	10	1	4	M/13	joint
Average	10.33 years		11.33 months	13.40 years	

[a]Time in months, as of September, 2003.
[b]M = married. Time in number of years married, as of September 2003.

Table 2: *Demographic Information (Group Two)*

Family	Age of child	Siblings	Time since separation[a]	Marital status/time[b]	Custody arrangement
7	9.5	0	19	C/16	joint
8	9.5	1	24[c]	M/7	joint
9	10	0	12	M/17	joint
10	9	1	19	C/missing	joint
12	10	1	13	C/9	sole
13	10	1	12	missing	joint
14	12	2	5	M/16	joint
15	11	0	11	D/6-M/5	missing
Average	10.13 years		14.38 months	12.67 years	

[a]Time in months, as of January, 2004.
[b]M = married, C = common-law, D = dating. Time in number of years parents were together, as of January, 2004.
[c]Each parent for this family provided only approximate timelines for the separation, therefore this number is only an approximation.

Outcomes

The results of the data collection measures will be presented in terms of the four

main objectives of the program (see program logic model in chapter 3).

Objective 1

The first objective of this intervention was to help children accurately understand

the divorce and to change inaccurate beliefs children may have about the divorce. The

first two expected outcomes based on the target variables for this objective were (a)

increased understanding of the divorce and (b) decreased self-blame. These were

measured using the CBAPS scale, parent reports, facilitator observations, and children's

post-group information.

CBAPS scale. For Group One, the mean score at pre-group was 60.4 (minimum

44.0, maximum 70.0) and the mean at post-group was 66.0 (minimum 57.0, maximum

72.0). One child did not complete the post-measure (withdrew from group), therefore the

paired-samples *t*-test was calculated on a sample of five children (n = 5). The change in

the mean scores from pre- to post-test was non-significant. Although the statistic did not

reach significance, the general trend of scores was in the expected direction for all

children, that is, higher scores at post-group (see Figure 1). Higher scores are indicative

that the children's beliefs and understanding of the divorce became more accurate by the

end of the group. However, for three of the five children, this increase in scores was very

small. This scale did not include information about whether or not there was a clinical

cut-off score that would indicate severe maladjustment in children (Kurdek & Berg,

1987).

Figure 1: Group One Scores on Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale

Figure 1: Group One Scores on Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale
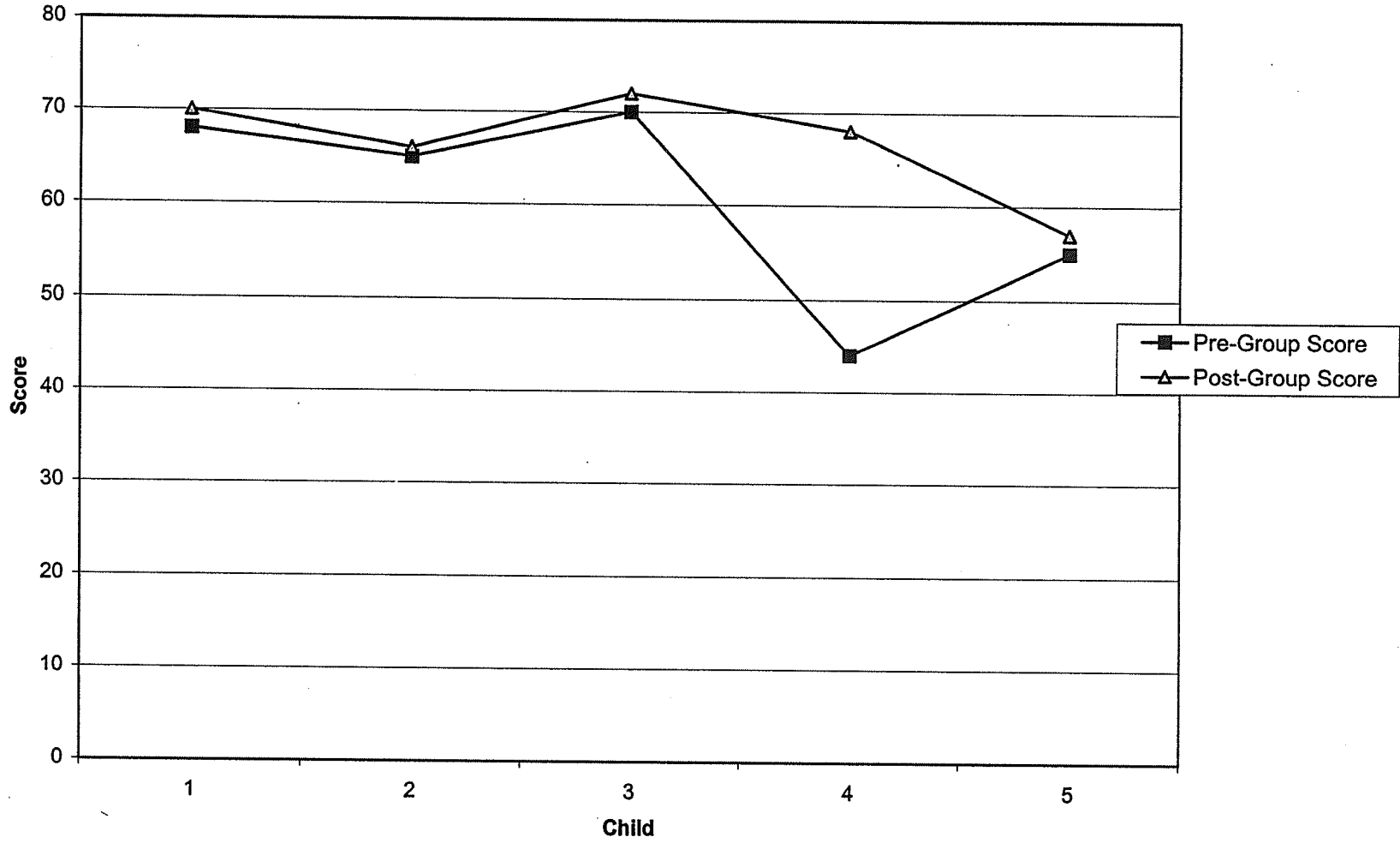
For Group Two, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted on a sample of five children as two children chose not to complete the measure at post-group (n = 5). The mean at pre-group was 61.8 (minimum = 60.0, maximum = 68.0) and was 65.4 at post-group (minimum = 63.0, maximum = 69.0). This difference was found to be significant (t = 4.43, p < .05). Because the sample size is small, this finding needs to be interpreted with caution. However, both the trend in scores combined with the statistical analysis suggests that children's beliefs about divorce became more accurate following the group (see Figure 2). The increase in scores for individual children in this group is greater than children in Group One and shows more consistent change (except for one child's score) compared to Group One children.

Parent interview information. Table 3 summarizes the findings of parent reports on the variable of *beliefs,* compared at all three interview times for Group One. There were some changes reported by parents that were in a positive direction. For example, worry about one parent had improved by post-group. Parents who indicated prior to the group that their children needed to better understand the divorce reported that they felt this had been achieved by the end of the group. As well, parents who indicated that their children needed to decrease their self-blame reported at post-group that this had occurred (with the exception of one parent's report). One parent reported that they felt the experience of separation had been normalized for their child. For the issue of loyalty conflicts and worry about making adult decisions, one parent was not able to determine if there was a change. At the follow-up interview (approximately one month following the group), all parents indicated that changes reported at post-group had been maintained.

Figure 2: Group Two Scores on Children's Beliefs About Parental Divorce Scale

Table 3: *Parent Interview Information: Main Concerns (Group One)*

Type of issue	Example of issues	Number of parents indicating a concern		
		Pre	Post[a]	Follow-up
		(n = 7)	(n = 9)	(n = 6)
Behavioural	Dealing with angry/upset feelings	1	2	2
	Communicating with parent	4	1	1
	Aggressive behaviour[b]	1	1	missing
Beliefs	Parental blame	2	2	1
	Self-blame	1	0	0
	Loyalty conflict[c]	1	nr	1
	Worry about one parent	1	0	0
	Worry about making adult decisions	1	nr	nr
	General understanding of separation	3	nr	0
	Normalize the experience/decrease isolation	1	0	0
Self-Esteem	Described as low by parent	2	0	0
Total[d]		18	6	5

nr = parent did not rate this aspect.
[a]Includes two parents who did not provide pre-group data.
[b]At post-group, this was a new issue for a different parent than reported at pre-group.
[c]At follow-up, this was a new issue for a different family than reported at pre-group.
[d]This represents the total number of issues reported.

One new issue arose for one family which involved the child experiencing a loyalty conflict between her parents. Although this issue had been identified at the pre-group, it was identified by a different parent at follow-up. Overall, these findings suggest that some positive changes did occur in this area following the group.

Table 4 presents the findings for Group Two for the category of *beliefs*. All parents who had wanted their children to participate in the group to help normalize the experience felt that this had been accomplished. One parent had wanted their child to have a better understanding of step-families and reported that this had improved following the group. For one family where the child was reported at pre-group to be angry at one parent, this was still the same following the group. At follow-up, one parent noticed that friendships had become more important to the child. This was categorized under normalization as it may represent the child feeling better about the situation and focusing on receiving support from friends. Unfortunately, parents felt they were not able to determine if there were changes on the issues of self-blame or better understanding of the separation. However, information on these variables was gathered from other sources as well.

Facilitator observations. My observations of both groups are summarized in Table 5 for the variables *understanding of divorce* and *self-blame*. The first column ("operational definition") indicates the criteria used to determine whether children were demonstrating an appropriate understanding of divorce or whether they showed self-blame. As indicated, in Group One, there were some examples that suggested the children had an accurate understanding of the divorce. As well, there was some evidence that self-blame had decreased by the end of the group for one child in particular. For
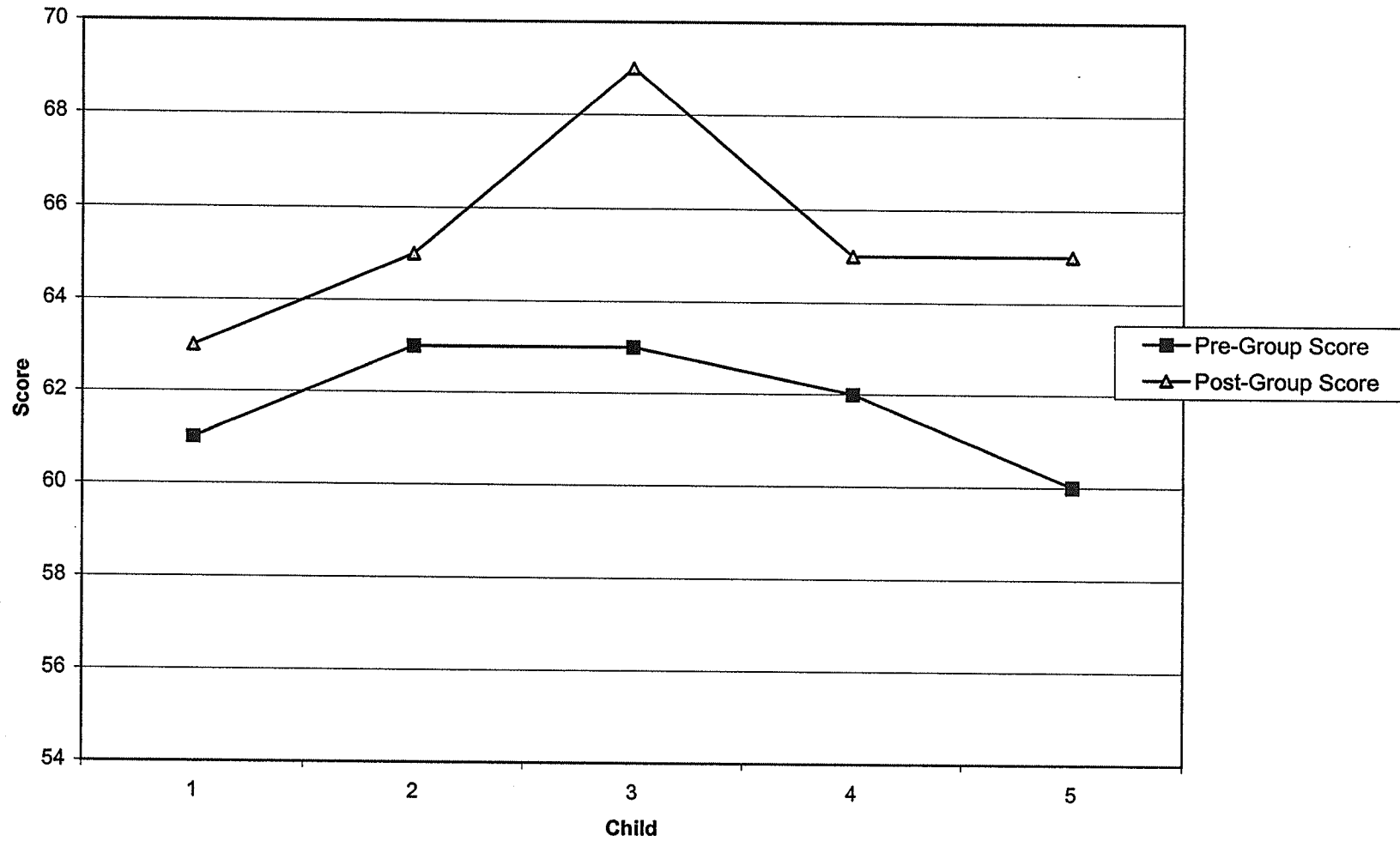
Table 4: *Parent Interview Information: Main Concerns (Group Two)*

Type of issue	Example of issues	Number of parents indicating a concern		
		Pre	Post	Follow-up
		(n = 13)	(n = 11)	(n = 10)
Behavioural	Communicating with parent	4	3	2
	Anger/acting-out behaviour	1	0	0
Beliefs	Self-blame	2	nr	0
	Better understanding of separation	2	nr	0
	Better understanding of step-families	1	0	0
	Dealing with sad/worried feelings	1	missing	missing
	Worry about one parent	1	0	0
	Anger toward one parent	1	1	1
	Normalize the experience[a]	6	0	0
Self-Esteem	Described as low by parent	4	nr[b]	0
Total[c]		23	4	3

nr = parent did not rate this aspect.
[a]This includes social interaction with other kids, receiving support from other kids, decreasing feelings of isolation.
[b]One parent felt it was the same, three parents could not determine.
[c]This represents the total number of issues reported.

Table 5: *Facilitator Observations: Understanding of Divorce and Self-Blame*

Group One

Operational definition	Example of behaviours recorded
Able to relate to experiences in separation	Kids related to examples of positive changes or aspects of separation
Able to recall information learned about separation	Kids described feelings of children in hypothetical situations
Able to give accurate advice to other kids	One child answered questions about feelings on individual worksheet
Verbal or written indications of their role	Advice to other kids included ideas of permanency, looking at the positive aspects
in separation	Recalled info from video on truths/myths of separation
	One child made connection between our discussion of kids not to blame with
	information from guidance counsellor
	No children specifically mentioned that divorce is not kids' fault on advice
	worksheet

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Table 5 continued: *Facilitator Observations: Understanding of Divorce and Self-Blame*

Group Two

Operational definition	Example of behaviours recorded
Able to relate to experiences in separation	Children related to examples of positive changes or aspects of separation
Able to recall information learned about separation	Children contributed ideas about what a family is
Able to give accurate advice to other kids	One child could explain grief process to others
Verbal or written indications of their role	Some children could relate to feelings in grief process
in separation	Recalled info from video on truths/myths of separation
	Advice to other kids focused on letting kids know they weren't alone,
	there are some positives, and that parents still love them
	One child talked about kids maybe being able to get parents back together
	One child talked about feeling self-blame
	No children specifically mentioned that divorce is not kids' fault on advice
	worksheet

Group Two there were also some examples that demonstrated that the children were able to understand the information taught about separation and divorce. However, there was one instance where a child had a perception that the separation was temporary and that children could bring parents back together. In terms of feelings of self-blame, there were some examples showing that children may have felt that they were to blame in their parents' separation. There were no specific examples where children verbally indicated that they recognized that they were not to blame. However, it should be noted that these examples were observed during the group sessions. It cannot be known for certain whether children's perceptions changed after the sessions when they could process the information for themselves.

Child post-group information. Answers reported by children following the group provided some indication that they understood their family situation. For Group One, four children completed the evaluation form and all children (n = 5) were interviewed. When asked if they learned anything new about divorce or separation, two children responded "yes" in the interview and two children responded "yes" on the form. One child responded to the question with "not much." However, no children were able to provide examples of what they learned. Three of the children reported in the interview that they had heard similar information prior to the group from other sources (e.g., school guidance counsellor, friends).

For Group Two, five children completed an evaluation form and one child partially completed it. The findings were similar to those of Group One. As an example of what they learned, one child indicated that they learned that they were not the only one (with separated parents) and although that they knew this before, being in the group

helped to reinforce it. All children (n = 7) from Group Two participated in an interview. During the interview when asked if they learned anything about separation, one child indicated "maybe" and two children indicated "yes." One child said that they learned they were not alone and the other child could not provide any examples. Two children said they had heard the information before and one of these children said that it was still helpful to learn it again. Therefore, their understanding of divorce and feelings of self-blame may not have been directly changed by participating in this group. However, it could be assumed that the information learned in the group supplemented what they learned before and helped to cement some of these thoughts for the children. One child said they did not learn anything about separation. However, as will be described later, there were some possible explanations for this response which make it atypical.

The third expected outcome for the first objective was *improved self-esteem (and positive feelings about their family situation)*. This was a long-term goal for this objective, therefore, this information will be described in the next section as it relates more closely to the next objective.

Objective 2

The second objective was to give children a sense of social and emotional support within the group, to allow them to recognize there are other children in a similar situation and to provide a place for children to talk with others about their thoughts and feelings. The first two expected outcomes for this objective were (a) *a decreased sense of isolation and increased peer interaction within the group* and (b) *an increased expression of feelings*. Facilitator observations and children's post-group information were used to measure these variables.

Facilitator observations. In order to assess whether or not children felt a decreased sense of isolation, their peer interaction behaviour within the group was examined. Table 6 provides some examples of how the children in both groups interacted with each other. The "operational definition" column indicates the criteria used to assess which behaviours represented peer interaction and group behaviour. Instances consistent with positive peer interaction were noted along with some instances where children chose to work alone or expressed negative feelings toward others. The negative examples were isolated instances and not typical of general behaviour. For Group One, the children seemed to work well with the other children and no child appeared to isolate themselves from the others on a regular basis. In general, Group Two displayed more group participation than Group One and the children interacted more frequently with each other than the children in Group One. Although some children chose to work alone on activities, most children chose to work together or to interact with each other during individual activities. One negative interaction was observed, however, this was an isolated incident and may have been more related to one child's mood during the session rather than a negative feeling toward another child.

In my observations I also recorded examples where children were contributing ideas or sharing their feelings in the group sessions. It is assumed that increased expression of feelings in the group may lead to increased expression of feelings outside the group. However, that information was not specifically collected in a systematic way. Table 7 outlines instances where children were expressing feelings in the group. In Group One, depending on the topic and where the group was in the process, all children did express their feelings at some point. One child was more expressive than others. Some

Table 6: *Facilitator Observations: Group/Peer Interaction*

Group One

Operational Definition	Examples of behaviour recorded
Able to verbally/non-verbally work well with others	All participated in partner activities at beginning
Involvement with other kids during activities	All kids shared information with each other about schools and
Non-involvement with others or in group activities	interests prior to sessions and at break
	Gender split- boys worked well, girls worked well, but some
	negative feelings indicated verbally by one girl about one boy
	Negative feelings subsided at end of group indicated by written comment by
	girl
	One child constantly talked through group sessions, was
	disruptive at times
	Two of three girls worked together on one activity, one girl
	chose to work on own
	All kids shared their crafts with each other and described them to group

Table 6 continued: *Facilitator Observations: Group/Peer Interaction*

Group Two

Operational definition	Examples of behaviour recorded
Able to verbally/non-verbally work well with others	One child at beginning did not participate in making a name-tag
Involvement with other kids during activities	All participated in partner activities and shared about themselves/families
Non-involvement with others or group activities	Most children shared information with each other about schools and interests at break and sat together
	One child chose to sit alone during breaks
	Some shared with others during group discussions
	Worked together during role-plays
	Boys shared their activities with each other, talked about interests
	Four children chose to work in partners when not required
	Two children chose to work individually on activities
	Some children shared their pictures with the group
	Some children responded to others' statements during games, relating to experiences or feelings
	One child did not participate in game at first, then joined later on

Table 6 continued: *Facilitator Observations: Group/Peer Interaction*

Operational definition	Examples of behaviour recorded
	One negative interaction where one girl told another girl she was sitting in her seat
	All wrote positive comments about each other and shared them with each other at the end

Table 7: *Facilitator Observations: Expression of Feelings*

Group One

Operational definition	Example of behaviours recorded
Verbal or written contributions of feelings or personal experiences	Three children shared feelings they had experienced
	One child shared experiences but not specific feelings
	Initially, only two children shared feelings in closing circle activity
	No children shared feelings in circle activity
	All kids shared how they were feeling in picture form, some chose to explain their feelings based on picture
	One child rarely contributed specific feelings until last session
	One child discussed feelings if specifically addressed or if part of an activity
	Two children volunteered to describe a picture they drew
	Children did not share personal feelings regarding self-esteem

Table 7 continued: *Facilitator Observations: Expression of Feelings*

Group Two

Operational definition	Example of behaviours recorded
Verbal or written contributions of feelings or personal experiences	Contributed to brainstorm session on ground rules
	Shared information about themselves at check-in circles
	All shared how they were feeling at closing circle
	All shared about their families in partner activity
	Some children shared their feelings when first found out about the separation
	All shared a family tradition they had
	Four children provided personal examples to use for problem-solving and anger management activity
	Four children shared a picture they drew with the group
	Three children shared their feelings about self-esteem
	All shared feelings during group games
	Some children shared a "warm fuzzy" they wrote about themselves
	Two children related personal experiences to the video
	Three children shared personal experiences about separation

children expressed feelings in relation to specific activities or when the were specifically asked a question. However, there were times when the children were not expressing feelings or choosing to "pass" rather than share with the group.

Overall, Group Two expressed their feelings more than Group One. There were more examples of children sharing their feelings related to their family and the separation (as opposed to how they were feeling that day or what was going on for them with friends or school as was more common in Group One). There was one child in Group Two who contributed less to group discussions on feelings compared to the other children. In Group Two, there were more examples of children voluntarily sharing their feelings as opposed to sharing them in relation to a game or activity.

Child post-group information. Following the group, the children were asked how they felt about working with the other children in the group. The intention was that this would provide a sense of whether or not the kids felt isolated or alone. For Group One, when asked what they liked most about the group, one child said they enjoyed the other kids the most (on the evaluation form). In the post-group interview, two children indicated they enjoyed the other kids and making new friends best about the group. When specifically asked if they felt they could be friends with the other kids in the group, three children indicated they did. All children indicated they enjoyed doing activities with the other kids.

Findings for Group Two were similar. Two children indicated on the evaluation form that they did meet kids with whom they could be friends with and one child said "sort of." Two children said "no," with one explaining it was because they did not know the kids well enough. However, in the interview, when asked if they enjoyed working

with the other kids on the activities, all children indicated that they did. When asked what they liked best about the group, four children responded on the evaluation form that they liked "all the people" or "meeting new people." During the interview, one child said they liked meeting other kids "with the same problem as me" and one child said that they liked it because they made new friends. Overall, these findings are an indication that most of the children did find the social aspect of the group to be positive and noteworthy about their participation in the group. One of the main goals of the group was for children to have the opportunity to interact with other children going through the same experience. Therefore, this finding strongly supports the fact that this intervention accomplished this goal. For the few children who did not find the social aspect of the group to be positive, it is possible that individual factors (e.g., personality, family situation) may have been an influence and these will be discussed later.

Questions were included to ascertain the children's comfort level with sharing their feelings in the group. Although this may not necessarily relate to actual expression of feelings, it can still provide some useful information. For Group One, two children indicated "yes" they felt comfortable sharing their feelings in the group, one child indicated "sort of," and one child indicated they did not feel comfortable sharing their feelings. For Group Two, three children indicated "yes," one child indicated "no," and one indicated "maybe" in response to this question (evaluation form). This helps to explain why some children were generally more expressive in the group while others were only expressive at certain times. The atmosphere of the group plays an important role in this behaviour and the children's responses help to shed some light on how they

experienced the group. All children in both Group One and Group Two indicated they felt

comfortable sharing their feelings in the group (interview). However, this was a

face-to-face meeting and although children were encouraged to be honest and not worry

about hurting the feelings of the facilitator, it is possible that these responses were not

accurate as they differed from the responses on the anonymous questionnaire. Therefore,

for Group Two, I asked the kids if they could say what it was about the group that made it

comfortable to talk. One child said it was because they were "with friends," one said it

was because the other kids listened when they talked, and one child said it was because

the group was private.

The third expected outcome for the second objective was *to improve children's

self-esteem.* An attempt was made to determine whether or not there were any changes

observed in children's self-esteem following the group. The Hare Self-Esteem scale and

parent interview information were used to measure this variable.

HSE scale. For Group One, the overall mean of the pre-group scores on this scale

was 90.2 (minimum 72.0, maximum 97.0) and the mean of post-group scores was 91.2

(minimum 76.0, maximum 100.0). The paired samples *t*-test was used to examine the

statistical significance of this change. The result was not significant (n = 5). On this

measure, the general trend of scores was not in the expected direction for all children (see

Figure 3). For two children, their scores were in the expected direction, much more so for

one of the children. For one child, there was a slight decrease from pre- to post-group,

which is opposite to what would be expected. In two cases scores remained the same

from pre- to post-group. Higher scores indicate more positive self-esteem. However, there

was no designated cut-off point in scores to suggest whether or not a child was in a

Figure 3: Group One Scores on Hare Self-Esteem Scale
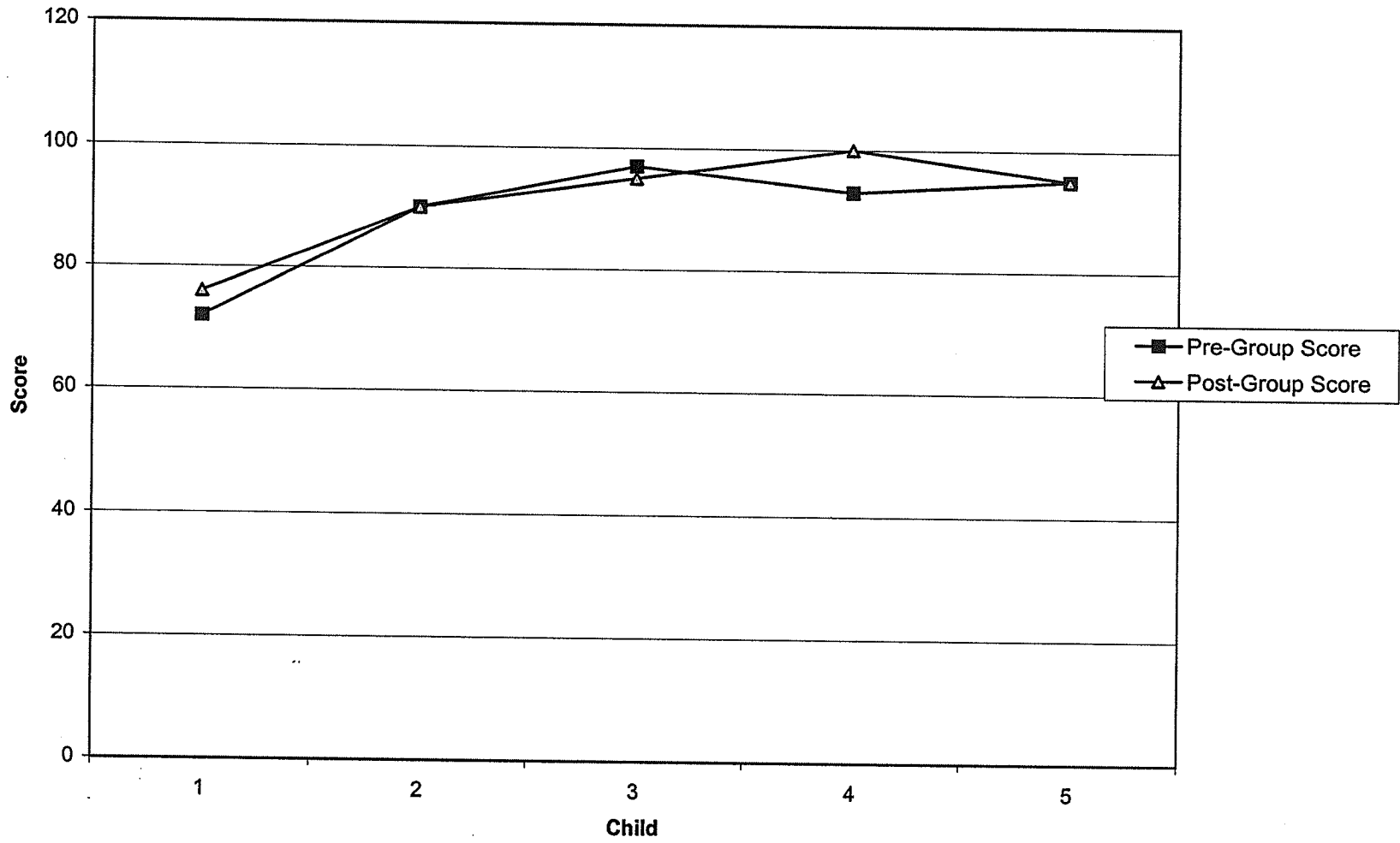
clinical range for low self-esteem (Corcoran & Fischer, 2000). Although some children did not have high scores and their scores did not increase, this does not suggest that they were experiencing maladaptive self-esteem levels.

For Group Two, the overall mean at pre-group (i.e., first group session) was 90.4 (minimum = 74.0, maximum = 105.0). The overall mean following the group actually decreased to 86.7 (minimum = 71.0, maximum, 103.0) which was opposite to what was expected. This difference in means was not statistically significant (n = 7). As with Group One, the trend of scores was not in the expected direction (see Figure 4). However, there was a larger difference in means for Group Two compared to Group One, and this difference was in the negative direction. For two children, their score had increased at post-group and one of these was very dramatic. Two children had scores that dramatically decreased at post-group whereas two other children's scores only slightly decreased. One child's score remained the same. It is interesting to note that for both groups, findings were similar if one considers the number of children who had increased scores, the number who remained the same, and the number who had decreased scores at post-group. As will be described later, there are several limitations that need to be considered with the variable of self-esteem and the methodology used to measure this, which may help to explain these unexpected findings.

Parent interview information. At pre-group, two parents from Group One indicated that their child's self-esteem was low and they hoped that the group would improve on this. At post-group, these parents said that there was an improvement. For example, one child was reported to have improved socially and at school.

Figure 4: Group Two Scores on Hare Self-Esteem Scale

Legend:
- Pre-Group Score
- Post-Group Score

X-axis: Child (1–7)
Y-axis: Score (0–120)
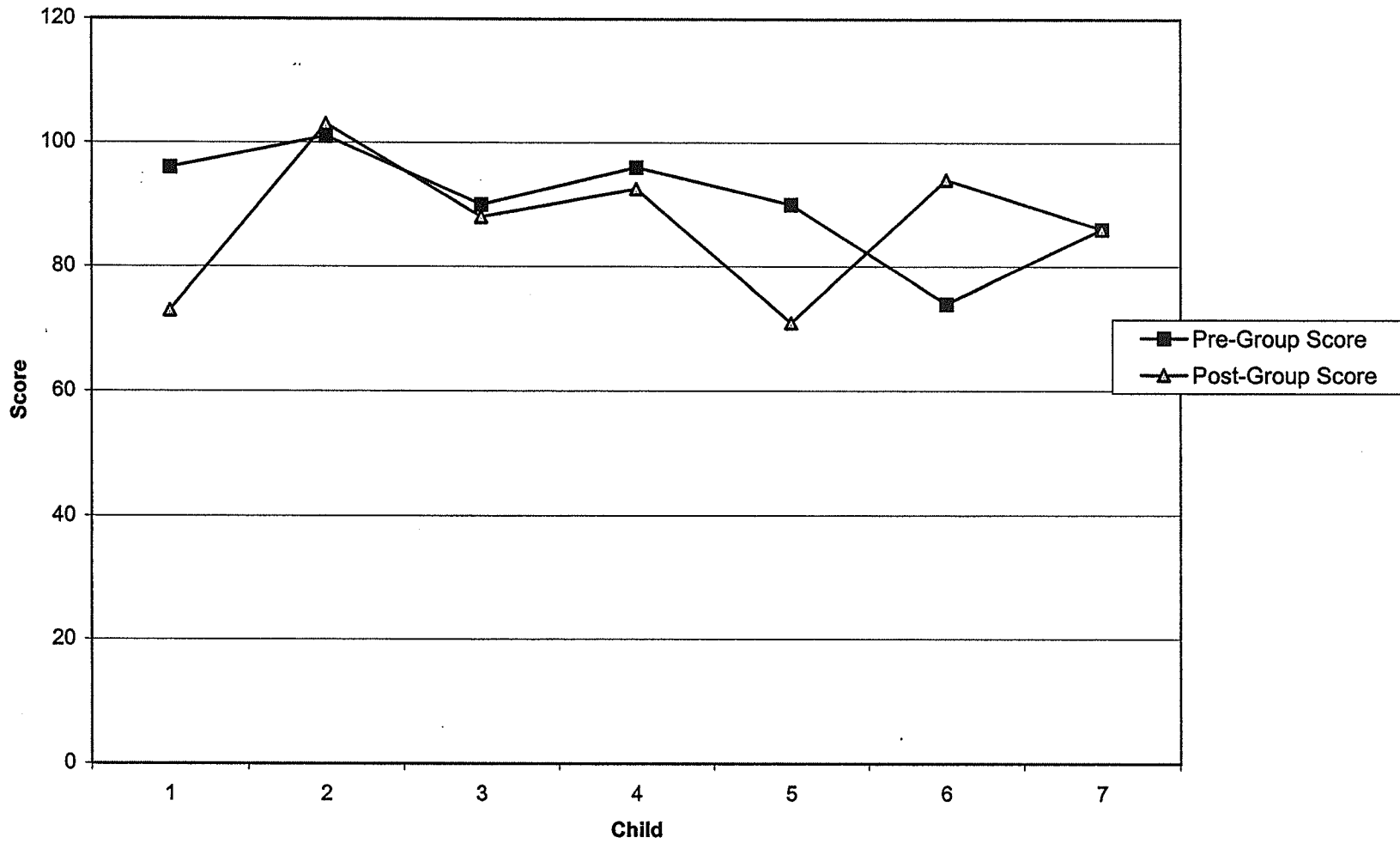
The other child was reported to have improved socially and had become more involved in social groups and programs. At follow-up, parents for both these children indicated that this improvement in self-esteem was being maintained (see Table 3 for summary).

For Group Two, four parents indicated that they had wanted the group to improve their child's self-esteem. At the post-group interview, one parent felt that it was the same and attributed this to a personality trait of the child (i.e., that the child has always underestimated the extent to which other's like him despite information indicating otherwise) and three parents could not determine if it had changed or not. At follow-up, one parent indicated that they felt their child's self-esteem had improved, which was not observed at the post-group interview. No parents reported this as a concern at follow-up (see Table 4 for summary).

Overall, these findings suggest that there may have been an improvement in some children's self-esteem over the course of the group. However, this was mainly supported by parent reports rather than the quantitative measure used. This highlights the importance of not relying solely on one form of data from which to draw conclusions. It is important to note that further follow-up evaluation using the self-esteem scale may have yielded more reliable results, as an eight week period may not be sufficient time for change to be measurable on such an enduring trait.

Objective 3

The third objective of this group was to teach the children skills for coping with their family situation (e.g., strategies for dealing with problems or situations they

may encounter during this family transition; skills for communicating with others, constructively dealing with angry feelings). The first expected outcome was for the children to *have an increased understanding of positive/constructive ways of behaving and interacting with others*. It was expected that this change would lead to improvements in two other areas; self-confidence and self-esteem. However, the first expected outcome was used as a way to assess this objective, as the others were seen as longer-term goals and were not able to be accurately assessed within the time period of the data collection. Facilitator observations and children's post-group information were used to assess this expected outcome. .

Facilitator observations. Table 8 summarizes examples of behaviour observed during both groups that indicated whether or not children understood some of the behaviour skills taught. The criteria used to assess this expected outcome are listed in the "operational definition" category. In Group One, all children demonstrated use of an "I message" for communicating how they feel. One child attempted to demonstrate using an "I message" in a role play, but was unable to do so. It was unclear whether this is because the child did not understand it or was trying to impress the other kids by being humourous. Some children gave examples of constructive ways to handle anger and all were able to complete a worksheet on ways to deal with angry feelings. The children also contributed ideas about ways to solve problems using the problem solving model presented.

For Group Two, most of the children were able to use an "I message" to share their feelings and one child demonstrated this in a role play. Most children shared examples of ways to handle angry feelings. Some children shared examples of ways to

Table 8: *Facilitator Observations: Understanding of Positive or Constructive Behaviours*

Group One

Operational Definition	Example of behaviours recorded
Able to give examples (communication, anger management, solving problems)	One child gave an example of an "I message" related to separation
	All kids attempted to use "I message"
Able to role-play behaviours	Most kids able to give examples of how to brain storm solutions to a problem
Demonstrated positive behaviours in group	
	One child did not seem to be paying attention to problem-solving model
	One child attempted to role-play "I message" but could not
	Most kids could give examples of constructive ways to handle anger in hypothetical situations
	Most kids indicated on a worksheet that they would try alternate ways of handling angry feelings
	Two children were disruptive in group sessions, not listening to others' talking, fooling around

Table 8 continued: *Facilitator Observations: Understanding of Positive or Constructive Behaviours*

Operational definition	Examples of behaviour recorded
Able to give examples (communication, anger management, solving problems)	Three children were respectful of others who were talking
	One child made an angry comment to another child rather than
Able to role-play behaviours	trying a constructive way of expressing anger
Demonstrated positive behaviours in group	
Group Two	
	One child gave example to group of an "I message"
	All kids used "I message" during closing circle
	Some kids could share problem solving and anger management strategies
	Some children were talking when others were talking during a game

solve problems. There was an instance of behaviour where children were not respecting other children during their turn in a game, however, the behaviour of the children for the most part was positive. Generally, the children appeared to have learned something from the group in terms of behaviour as indicated by their verbal recollections and contributions. Whether or not this knowledge was transferred into behaviours outside the group is not known.

Based on my overall observations of how the children were behaving and interacting with other children in the group sessions, I noticed changes that occurred for some children over the duration of the group. For example, in Group One, two children who began being very quiet and less interactive with others had become more talkative and participatory by the end. These children became more comfortable initiating conversations with other children as well. One child in this group began by being very talkative and participatory. However, where I noticed changes was in her ability to recall information discussed in previous sessions and relate this to other information she had been hearing from her guidance counsellor.

In Group Two, one child who had seemed very reluctant to participate in activities at the beginning had become more comfortable as the sessions progressed. He was involved in the activities and was interacting with the other children much more than he was initially. The other children seemed to respond positively to him, which may have helped increase his comfort with the group. Several children in this group were very participatory in most activities from the beginning. Where I noticed a change in them was that they became more comfortable suggesting variations to activities or volunteering to share information and examples even if not specifically asked to do so. The cohesiveness

of this group only became stronger throughout the sessions as most of the children interacted positively with each other during activities and at breaks.

Child post-group information. On both the evaluation form and in the interview the children were asked specifically if they had learned any skills in the group and if so, which ones. The responses indicated that the children had learned and understood some of the skills taught in the group. For Group One, three children indicated on the evaluation form that they had learned some new skills. When asked for an example, one child indicated "I messages." In the interview, three children indicated they learned some skills they could use after the group and examples included "I messages" and "anger skills." One child said that it would depend on the situation whether or not they would be able to use the skills taught. One child said they did not think they would use the skills taught as these skills would not make a difference if used in their situation.

For Group Two, five children indicated on the form that they had learned some new skills, two of which cited "I messages." Three children indicated "I don't know" in response to that question. During the interview, three children said they learned "I messages" and one child said they tried to use them at home. One child said they learned new ways to express anger and two children recalled the problem-solving cartoons that were handed out. One child said they did not learn any new skills and another said "maybe." These findings suggest that some children were able to retain some of the behaviour skills taught and some said they used some of these outside the group.

Objective 4

The fourth objective was *to facilitate positive outcomes from the group in the child's home environment.* One of the methods used to achieve this was through the

follow-up meetings or conversations with parents following the group. Parents were reminded about some of the skills learned in the group and how they could be attentive to these at home and encourage the use of these skills when they noticed their child behaving in those ways. The expected outcome was that children would use the skills and knowledge learned in the group, outside the group setting. Parent interview information was used to measure this variable.

Parent interview information. Table 3 summarizes the information collected from Group One parents at pre-group, post-group, and follow-up on the category of *behaviour*. At pre-group, one parent indicated that their child was experiencing a lot of anger in general, one parent indicated their child was acting aggressively (e.g., toward siblings), and four parents indicated that their children had poor communication skills. At post-group, the parent who identified a concern about their child's anger prior to group felt it was the same. One parent reported at post-group that there was a change in what may appear to be a negative direction; that the child seemed to get upset easier. Regarding aggressive behaviour, one parent did not report whether this changed or not. However, one parent who did not contribute pre-group data, said they felt that their child's aggressive behaviour had decreased with regard to their siblings. In terms of communication skills, one parent said their child's communication skills were the same as pre-group. Three parents indicated that their child was more communicative generally, but not necessarily with regard to feelings about the divorce. One parent indicated that although their child was not verbally communicative, they felt that they were more reflective and thoughtful about what was going on.

As described before, these changes reported following the group were maintained at follow-up. In addition, one parent specifically stated that the child's behaviour in general had improved at home. From these findings, it can be said that most children's behaviour had shown some positive changes by the end of the group, whether it be in communication skills in general or having a better understanding of how to deal with various situations. However, there was not much change reported by parents in terms of expressions of anger or aggressive behaviour.

Group Two information collected at post-group and follow-up for *behaviour* is summarized in Table 4. Only one parent reported a change in their child's communication skills at post-group. However, one of the parents who did not notice a change attributed it to the child's personality more so than the child not having learned anything from the group about how to communicate better. In terms of aggressive or acting-out behaviour at home, one parent who indicated this as a concern pre-group reported that following the group the child had been trying other strategies to deal with anger other than taking it out on a sibling.

At follow-up, the results were more promising with this group. For example, one parent reported their child was demonstrating an increase in communication about her feelings. For the child who had improved communication at post-group, this was reported to be maintained at follow-up. The positive improvements reported at post-group for the child who was behaving aggressively toward a sibling had further improved at follow-up. However, for two of the children, there was an increase in behavioural problems (e.g., rebelliousness, power struggles with parents) reported at follow-up. This could also be

attributed to a developmental stage and may possibly be gender-related (as it was reported for boys but not girls).

This objective was considered to be a long-term goal of the practicum as the children will need time to process what they have learned and practice using it in their daily lives in order for it to become incorporated into their behaviour (Hodges, 1991). In collecting follow-up data from parents approximately one month after their post-group interview, only a few parents reported some behaviour changes in terms of use of skills. The parents from Group One who reported changes indicated that the change was in reference to improved behaviour in general and increased social participation. For Group Two, some more specific behavioural changes were noted, particularly regarding communication and anger management skills. For both groups, only two parents from each group reported any change in behaviour. The fact that more parents were not reporting any specific or positive behavioural changes supports previous findings that social skill and behavioural changes take longer to emerge than over the duration of the group. It is also possible that individual and family factors affected behaviour change. These will be discussed later.

Comparison of Group One and Two

The two groups have been analyzed and described separately for this report. This section provides an opportunity to explore some differences and similarities found between the groups, as well as how these may have contributed to two very different group environments. There is also some analysis of both groups combined into one sample to look for expected changes.

Two standardized measures were used to obtain data from both groups. This data was examined for comparison purposes to see if any similarities or differences between the two groups were present.

CBAPS Scale

Scores on this scale were obtained at the initial session for each group. The means were 60.3 (n = 6, minimum = 44.0, maximum = 70.0) for Group One and 62.7 (n = 8, minimum 60.0, maximum 68.0) for Group Two. This difference was not statistically significant using an independent samples *t*-test. Post-group scores on this scale were also compared using this *t*-test. The mean for Group One was 66.6 (n = 5, minimum = 57.0, maximum = 72.0) and for Group Two was 65.4 (n = 5, minimum = 63.0, maximum = 69.0). This difference was not statistically significant either, suggesting that these two groups were not different in terms of their beliefs about the separation when each time period was examined separately.

Finally, both groups were combined for an analysis of the pre- and post-group scores to see if, as one sample (n = 10), there were any significant differences found. On this measure, the pre-group mean for all children was 61.1 and the post-group mean was 66.0. This change is in the expected direction. The paired sample *t*- test in this case yielded significant results (t = 2.25, p = .051). This suggests that, as a whole, the children's beliefs about divorce changed in a positive direction from the beginning to the end of the group.

HSE Scale

Before moving on, an important aspect of how this measure was used to collect data must be noted. As mentioned earlier, Group Two was used as a comparison group on

this measure. The section will expand on the findings of this aspect in detail. A total of 12 children were interviewed in July and August 2003 and were split evenly into two groups. All children completed the HSE at this time (Time 1). However, after the first group had begun, I decided that beginning with only six children had the potential to lead to a problem of low numbers if children withdrew or were away for a session. Therefore, two more children were interviewed in November and December 2003 to be included in Group Two. Because the timing was significantly different than the initial interviews, these children did not complete the Time 1 HSE and were not included in the comparison sample.

For Group One, the HSE scale was completed a second time (Time 2) at their post-group interview in December 2003. Children who began Group Two in January 2004 filled out the HSE for a second time (Time 2) at their first group session. Therefore, there was a similar period of time over which this scale was completed for these children. During this time period, one group received the intervention (Group One) and one group did not (Group Two).

The mean scores obtained on this scale at Time 1 were 90.2 (n = 6, minimum = 72.0, maximum = 97.0) for Group One and 72.0 (n = 6, minimum = 20.0, maximum = 108.0) for Group Two. Using an independent samples t-test, it was determined that this difference was not significantly different. For Group Two, one child's score was significantly lower than the rest (20.0) which may have skewed the distribution of the scores. A second t-test was performed with this outlier removed and the result was still non-significant. This suggests that these two groups may have been similar in terms of their level of self-esteem at the same point in time.

At Time 2 (i.e., the end of Group One and the beginning of Group Two), the mean for Group One was 91.2 (n = 5, minimum = 76.0, maximum = 100.0) and the mean for Group Two was 95.7 (n = 6, minimum = 74.0, maximum = 105.0). Again, this difference was not statistically significant. For Group One, the mean score on this scale only slightly increased from pre-group to post-group. This is in the expected direction, but only very minimally. It is interesting to note that for Group Two, the mean score on this scale actually increased over this period of time. This is not the expected direction for this measure, particularly for the comparison group that did not receive the intervention.

Finally, all children were combined for a paired sample *t*-test to determine if the change in scores on this measure at the beginning of the group (i.e., Time 1 for Group One and Time 2 for Group Two) were significantly different than scores at the conclusion of the group (i.e., Time 2 for Group One and Time 3 for Group Two). This result was not statistically significant, indicating that the children's self-esteem did not show any substantial change over the duration of the group (n = 12).

There may be several reasons why these findings did not indicate that children's self-esteem improved over the course of the group. One explanation may have to do with the effect that focusing on the topic of separation has on how children feel about themselves following the group. It is possible that participating in a group that encourages children to focus on the separation of their parents, increases their awareness of their family situation and may decrease how the children feel about the situation and themselves. For example, in the comparison group analysis, overall, children in Group One showed a small increase in their scores on the self-esteem scale while the children who were not participating in a group showed a large increase in their scores. The

children in Group One had more exposure to discussions and activities that made them think about their family and how things had changed for them. If these children had been coping with the situation by not thinking about it (i.e., using an avoidance coping strategy), then participating in the group may have given them a more realistic coping strategy. However, this may have led these children to experience a slight decrease in how they perceived themselves, as reflected in their scores at the end of the group. The children in Group Two were waiting for their group to begin and did not have the same experience of focusing on their family situation. Therefore they may not have had the same reflection about themselves that Group One children had. This is one possible explanation for these unexpected findings.

There were some limitations that need to be addressed with regard to the HSE measure used to assess change in self-esteem. Self-esteem is a very broad concept and is not a trait that necessarily varies from day to day but rather takes time to change. It is possible that this measure could not detect any change that occurred over a short period of time (i.e., a few months). This supports an interpretation of the self-esteem data that favours the possibility that self-esteem may not significantly change over a short time period or at least not in a measurable way. This could have been alleviated or assessed by having this measure completed after a longer time interval than 8 weeks.

Another possible interpretation for why expected changes were not found could be due to factors influencing children's completion of the scales. For example, children's responses on this measure could have been affected by their having a particularly good or bad day when the scale was filled out. Therefore, it is not likely that the intervention itself lead to the decrease found in some children's self-esteem scores. These limitations were

understood prior to the evaluation, however, this measure was still included to see if any changes in children's self-esteem could be detected over this short period of time.

Situational Differences

There were also several differences noted between the two groups that may account for differences in outcomes on the variables. First, was the number of participants. Group One began with six children and ended with only five. Group Two began with eight children and ended with seven. Although a difference of two children may not at first seem significant, as a facilitator I felt that it did make a difference in group dynamics and how group activities occurred. For example, Group One children were less open in large group discussions than children in Group Two. It is possible that a group of only five children offered less anonymity, which may be a factor that helps a child feel more comfortable in sharing feelings. Another explanation is that with a larger number of children, it is likely that there will be more children who are outgoing and can generate an atmosphere of sharing feelings and ideas. This may lead to more children feeling comfortable sharing feelings. A second difference was that Group One children worked better on individual activities or in pairs, whereas Group Two children worked better when in the large group or two medium sized groups.

It was also apparent that some of the demographic information was different, when compared between groups. For example, most children in Group One had parents who were married; in Group Two, most of the children had parents who were living common-law and only a few were married. As well, there were two children in Group Two where the father who was involved in the separation was not the child's biological father (but was the only father the child had known and was the first separation for the

child). This was not the case for any children in Group One. Most children in Group Two had step-family members in their lives, however, this was not the case in Group One. Time since the separation was slightly higher for Group Two, which is expected as this group began four months after the first group.

Another difference between the groups was the personalities of the children and this made for very different group dynamics. As well, this had implications for how group activities were planned and designed in order to match with how the children responded to different types of activities. For example, the children in Group One were generally quieter in terms of sharing personal feelings in the group and participating in group discussions. These children worked better on individual activities and therefore, this was how activities were planned. For Group Two, these children were more comfortable with sharing their feelings and participating so more group activities could be planned.

Because the groups were not run concurrently, there were some changes made to the activities used in Group Two based on how the activities were received by the children in Group One. As well, there was a difference in how the scales were administered for each group. Group One completed the CBAPS scale only in session one, whereas Group Two completed both the CBAPS and the HSE scales in their first session.

To summarize, these groups had some similarities and some differences that may explain differences in findings on the variables being examined. With an intervention such as this one, similarities and differences in demographics, situations, and composition can play an important part in group dynamics, how the children perceive the group, and the extent to which children feel the information and activities are helpful. In addition,

these factors are important to consider particularly because it is a small sample size.

Some combined analysis was done to alleviate the issue of small sample size.

External Factors in Children's Circumstances

The outcomes observed and reported for each child can be affected by factors outside the group. Therefore, part of the parent interview included questions to assess whether there were other issues affecting the children. The main areas covered included parental conflict, participation in other interventions, and changes to the family situation. An examination of other external factors specific to each group is also presented.

Parental Conflict

One of the factors that has been highlighted in the literature as having a large influence in children's coping ability is level of conflict between parents (e.g., Grych & Fincham, 1992; Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). Parents were asked before and after the group to rate the level of perceived conflict with the other parent on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low conflict, 10 being high conflict). Reported levels of conflict for Group One showed a decrease for two families from pre- to post-group and this was maintained at follow-up. One family reported lower levels of conflict from post-group to follow-up. For two families, the level of conflict remained high throughout the group and after.

For Group Two, the levels of conflict reported by parents were mostly low to moderate pre-group. The ratings were mainly consistent between parents of each child with the exception of one family where one parent indicated high conflict and the other parent indicated low conflict. This translates into six of the seven families experiencing moderate to low levels of conflict. At post-group, most parents indicated that the level of

conflict was low. The one parent who did not indicate that conflict was low was the only parent for this family who provided post-group information. Therefore, for six of the families, the level of conflict was reported as being low at post-group. This pattern was maintained at follow-up. It is important to note the dramatic difference when compared to Group One levels of reported conflict, which was mainly high-moderate at all interview times.

Other Interventions

Some families were involved in other interventions. For example, in Group One, two children were involved with a school guidance counsellor and one child was involved in school group for separation/divorce. At post-group, one family reported that the parents participated in mediation. At follow-up, the parents of another family had begun mediation. For Group Two, only one family had received other interventions. The parents had participated in mediation and the child was participating in a group at school for separation and divorce. At follow-up, that family completed mediation and the child was still participating in the school group.

Family Changes

Parents were also asked about significant family changes that may have occurred during the group. For Group One, at post-group, one family reported illness in an extended family member. One family reported that one parent had a new partner. At follow-up, one parent reported that their family had experienced the death of family member and for one family, one parent no longer had a new partner. For Group Two, similar types of changes were also reported. However, a category of *miscellaneous* was added as there were a variety of different experiences that some families had, including

problems at school with other children, the family home going up for sale, the child experiencing negative attitudes from relatives on one side of the family, and one parent's house burning down. See Tables 9 and 10 for a summary of parent reports in these categories.

Logistical Factors

Group One

    Attrition. After the second session, one child dropped out of the group. In addition to this, the co-facilitator who began the group left the group around the same time. This resulted in the remaining children experiencing a few major changes in the third session; loss of a group member and co-facilitator and the addition of a new co-facilitator. These unexpected changes may have had an impact on the stability and comfort these children experienced in the group and on how they evaluated their experience in this group. This aspect may be particularly important for this population which may be experiencing some instability or inconstancy in their home environment. Therefore, it may be important to create a sense of consistency in this group setting.

    Environmental distractions. In Group One, the children filled out the post-group evaluation forms at the beginning of the last session. The last session also involved a pizza party. The goal was to have the children fill out the evaluations before the party began, so that would not influence their responses. However, the pizza arrived just as the kids began the evaluation form and many of them may have rushed through it to move on to the party. This may be reflected in the partial answers and answers where the children did not elaborate when asked.

Table 9: *Parent Interview Information: External Circumstances (Group One)*

Factor	Example		Number of parents reporting		
			Pre[a]	Post[b]	Follow-up[c]
			(n = 7)	(n = 9)	(n = 6)
Parental conflict	Level of conflict reported by parents	High (7-10)	5	2	2
		Moderate (4-6)	1	4	0
		Low (1-3)	0	0	3
			Number of families		
Other interventions	Child or parent receiving social or other services		0	4	3
Changes in family	Health, addition or leaving of members		0	2	2

[a]One parent said there was no opportunity for conflict because there was no communication or contact with the other parent. This could be classified as high conflict (Bacon & McKenzie, in press).
[b]Three parents could not rate/describe conflict level.
[c]One parent described the conflict as "low" but rated it as "5" on the scale, one parent could not rate conflict.

Table 10: *Parent Interview Information: External Circumstances (Group Two)*

Factor	Example		Number of parents reporting		
			Pre	Post[a]	Follow-up
			(n =13)	(n = 11)	(n = 10)
Parental conflict	Level of conflict reported by parents	High (7-10)	1	0	0
		Moderate (4-6)	5	1	1
		Low (1-3)	7	9	9
			Number of families		
Other interventions	Child or parent receiving social or other services		1	1	1
Changes in family	Health, addition or leaving of members		0	7	2
Miscellaneous	Issues not covered in previous categories		0	4	1

[a]One parent could not rate the level of conflict.

Group Two

Attendance. There were more absences in this group, with some children missing up to two sessions. One reason was weather related. A Manitoba winter brings many unpredictable weather patterns, including temperatures in the minus 40 range and blizzard conditions. Many parents were not able to bring their children to some group sessions because of this. As well, one child lived outside city limits and transportation was a problem regardless of the weather. Although reviews occurred of what was covered the previous session, it is not the same as if the children had actually attended the session. Therefore, some children missed specific topics and this may have affected their ability to recall what they learned or what they found useful in the group. Surprisingly, this did not seem to affect group dynamics too much as most of the children were still able to fit into the group during the other sessions.

Quantitative measures. Two children chose not to complete the CBAPS at the last group session, therefore the final number of children on which complete data was collected was only five. The small sample further limited the ability to find statistical differences. As well, this prevented me from being able to get a sense of how these children's beliefs had or had not changed based on changes in their scores. Another issue was with regard to the HSE. For one child the questions had to be read aloud to him as he was a very weak reader. This did not occur at the first data collection time and may have affected his responses (or differences in his scores) on the measure.

To summarize, these external factors may have had an effect on the group process and outcomes. The main difference between these groups was in group participation and

cohesion between group members. The main differences between the groups in terms of external factors include; (a) families of children in Group One generally reported higher levels of conflict than families of Group Two, (b) more children in Group One were involved in other interventions than children in Group Two, (c) families in Group Two were experiencing more family changes in terms of new family members or the loss of family members, and (d) Group One did not have the same co-facilitators for the duration of the group.

Based on these observations, one possibility is that for Group One, being in families with higher levels of conflict may have played a role in the degree to which they felt comfortable talking about their experience in the group. Perhaps these children need a longer period of time to get to know the other group members and facilitators to be able to feel a sense of trust and safety in sharing their experiences in the group. The fact that there was a change in co-facilitators may have exaggerated this experience, requiring the children to adapt to a new facilitator over a shorter period of time than the normal duration of the group.

Another possible way these factors may have influenced the group dynamics has to do with family changes. Children in Group Two may have been able to relate better to some of the experiences or situations that were discussed in the group because they were experiencing more changes in terms of step-families and family composition. This may have allowed them to feel more comfortable in sharing their experiences in the group setting. Children in Group One did not seem to experience as many changes and therefore, may not have felt as though they "fit in" with the changes or experiences discussed in the group.

Generally, using a group comparison method, there were no significant differences found between the two groups on the evaluative measures used in this practicum. However, there were various individual differences that can be explained using observations made from the group itself, as well as through looking at other factors that were going on for individual children. These will be discussed next.

Case Study Analysis

The purpose of this section is two-fold: (a) to supplement the findings of the data as analyzed above; and (b) to provide a more in-depth analysis of my observations of the children in the group and information learned about the family situation from parents. This more qualitative and context related information may help to explain factors that may have influenced changes or the lack thereof that were observed in the evaluative measures that were used.

Group One

Family #1. It was reported by this child's parent prior to the group that anger was a major issue for him. It was apparent in my observations of his behaviour that there was a lot of anger being expressed. For example, his verbal and written ideas often included swear words, fighting, and death. He also used the word "evil" to describe things we were talking about. At check in, his comments were often about having a bad day at school, being picked on or getting into trouble. In the group setting, at times his behaviour was disruptive and he had to be taken out of the room to work on an activity individually with a co-facilitator. On an individual basis, this child's verbal and written activities were less negative and he had an easier time focusing on the topic (e.g., completing a worksheet on feelings). It was difficult to determine whether or not the child was able to absorb some

of the topics discussed, however, in doing individual work it seemed that some information was getting through to him. Nevertheless, it did not appear to be reflected through a change in behaviour. At post group, this child indicated in an individual interview that he would use the anger skills taught. At the end of the group, all kids were asked to give advice to other kids whose parents had separated. This tool was useful for getting a general sense of how the children were coping with their situation. For this child, his advice to other kids was "Live with it"! I think this suggests that he is dealing with it because he has no choice, but does not really provide a clear indication of whether he is coping well with the situation.

There were factors in this child's environment that may have contributed to this behaviour. For example, the conflict level was reported by one of his parents as high both before and after the group. Based on some comments made by the child, he may have been passing a lot of negative messages between his parents. Part way through the group, this child's grandmother became terminally ill which was reported by one parent as being difficult for the child. An additional factor that became apparent from the child's other parent following the group was that it is possible that the child blamed himself for the separation as the physical separation occurred immediately after the child and that parent returned from an activity that the child initiated. This parent noticed the child began acting on "best behaviour" following the separation, a pattern that was uncharacteristic of his behaviour prior to the separation. Overall, there was no apparent change in his behaviour or thoughts over the duration of the group. However, his comments and behaviour individually with both the co-facilitator and me indicated that he had gained something from the group experience.

Family #2. For this child, the main concern of the parent prior to the group was self-esteem and loyalty conflicts between parents. Generally, this child seemed to "come out of his shell" as the group progressed. For example, the name tag he made in the first session was small and unreadable and he often chose to "pass" rather than share ideas. By the seventh session, his name written on a new name tag was more pronounced and at times he had to be asked to be quiet and listen while others talked. The change in his behaviour was also reflected in his parent's post-group report. It was reported that the child's behaviour was changing from being more withdrawn and shy in school to almost becoming disruptive. Although this is not necessarily a positive change, it does demonstrate the same kind of changes I observed in the child's behaviour during the group. In general this child participated in the activities and group discussion. He was one of two boys in the group and it seemed that the disruptive behaviour of the other boy would affect this boy's behaviour at times. There was a lot of skepticism expressed by this child about whether there was any point in children trying to do anything when it came to dealing with parents. This attitude may have affected his self-esteem ratings as well as use of the skills learned outside the group setting. His advice to other kids; "worst- separation, bad- travelling back and forth, some of the best things- parents still love you, presents times two (X 2)." It is possible that he was coping well, but not yet willing to try some of the skills learned in the group. Following the group, parent reports indicated that this child's self-esteem seemed to be better and that his behaviour in general had improved.

Family #3. This child, overall, seemed to be coping well and it is not clear whether this group played a significant role in her coping. There were no specific

concerns raised prior to the group except that parents wanted the child to have an accurate understanding of divorce and for the experience to be normalized. Her behaviour in the group was hard to explain. For the most part she was quiet and rarely contributed unless specifically asked. At times, she chose to work alone rather than with other kids. She also indicated that she did not want to continue with an activity when all the other kids did. Informally (i.e., just prior to the beginning of sessions and at break) she did have conversations with other children and the facilitators. She was also a year older than the other kids (after the one child dropped out). This may have played a role in whether she felt a part of the group and wanted to participate in activities with the other children. Also, she was an only child and perhaps was used to working on her own. She may also be more used to individual attention which would explain why she could engage in discussion if specifically addressed but was less participatory in group discussions. An interesting note is that her score on the HSE scale decreased slightly from pre- to post-group. It is possible that her experience in the group was not helpful for her self esteem. However, there was no specific concern raised by parents pre- or post-group regarding her self-esteem so measurement error could also be an explanation. Her score on the CBAPS was the highest of all the children, suggesting that she was not experiencing problematic beliefs about the separation. She appeared to be coping well as indicated in her advice to other kids going through parental separation: "Your parents may never get back together so don't plan on it. Some good things about your parents separating is you get almost two of everything, and you might do different things you might not have done when your parents were together. So just remember my advice to you; peace out"!

Post-group information helped to shed some light on positive changes the child had been experiencing. It is possible that she was doing well and did not feel the need to share with the group. For example, the conflict level of her parents decreased significantly over the course of the group, from high to low as reported by both parents. In her post-group interview, she indicated that the information discussed in the group was not new information for her and this may explain why she did not always seem to be paying attention during group discussions.

Family #4. I noticed the most significant change in behaviour in this child over the 8 week period of the group, which was corroborated by information from her parents as well as data collected on the quantitative measures. At the beginning of the group, this child was the most quiet of all the children and did not contribute to group discussions at all. As the group sessions progressed, she became more and more participatory, even volunteering information about activities she was doing at school and with friends. She seemed to interact more with one of the other girls in the group and they worked together on some activities. Near the end, she found out she had something in common with another child in the group and took the initiative to bring this up with her. She was ill for the last session so did not have the opportunity to share "advice to other kids" or complete a post-group evaluation form. It was difficult to determine how she was coping with the separation. This family's separation was most recent compared to the rest of the children (i.e., two months prior to beginning of group). Prior to the group, one parent indicated that this group was intended to be more preventative as there was not a lot of opportunity for any concerns to arise. Following the group, this parent felt that the group was a good experience for the child in general. The other parent mentioned concerns with

her self-esteem prior to the group. Following the group, this parent noticed a significant change in her behaviour and her self-esteem, particularly an increased involvement in social activities and clubs. Although the conflict level reported by parents in this family was moderate-high, this was just beginning to escalate at follow-up, so may not have been playing a major role in the child's coping behaviour at post-group. One parent did indicate at follow-up that it is possible that the child was experiencing some loyalty conflicts between parents, which may be a result of the passage of time in the separation experience for her. Overall, the group seems to have been a positive factor in her coping and adjustment to the separation.

Family #5. This child ended up dropping out of the group after the second session. There were many concerns brought up for this child by his parents prior to the group. For example, it was reported that the child's self-confidence and self-esteem was being undermined by one parent and relatives. It was also reported that the child was directing a lot of anger toward one parent early on in the parents' separation and the child had been to a psychiatrist due to suicidal ideations. A situation that had occurred closer to the beginning of the group was that the child had also been exposed to adult issues with regard to sexual orientation that were creating some confusion for him. However, there was not enough opportunity for me to get an accurate sense of how he may have been coping with the situation. His scores on the self-esteem measure were not lower than the other kids, however, his scores on the beliefs scale were slightly lower than the other kids'. Unfortunately, that information on its own is not useful in trying to get a sense of how the child was coping.

His parents had an extremely high conflict post-separation relationship as reported by both parents. Some communication and conflict issues between the parents were apparent to me as demonstrated through the parents not being able come to an agreement for transporting the child to and from the group. This created some challenges for me as I was passing information between parents about who was bringing the child and who was picking him up. This gave me a sense of what the child may be experiencing on a daily basis. Although the child indicated to me that the reason he did not want to come to the group was because he had learned the same information in a different group, it is possible that he was aware of the tension and conflict that it was creating between his parents and he was trying to minimize this by withdrawing himself from the group.

Family #6. Prior to the group, there were two main issues reported by one parent for this child. One issue was that the child expressed a lot of anger toward that parent and the other issue was that the child needed to know the divorce was not her fault. During the actual group, this child was the most participatory member, expressing her feelings and experiences early on in the group before any of the other kids did. She would always contribute to group discussions and got along fairly well with the other kids. Part way through the group, she seemed to develop some negative feelings towards another child. However, this was resolved by the end. She had a lot to say about divorce and what was going on for her. It was difficult to tell whether or not she was coping better by the end of the group, however, she seemed able to express her feelings. It is uncertain whether or not this was a behaviour she displayed at home.

Following the group, I was able to get some information from both parents (versus only one parent prior to the group). It was interesting that the information

provided by each parent was quite different. For example, one parent indicated that the child had become more easy going and less tense. The other parent indicated that the child became upset more easily and had a lot of anger and hurt toward one parent. At the conclusion of this group, this child was starting a group at school for children whose parents were separated. She had been in regular contact with a counsellor during the group and was able to relate information discussed in the group to information discussed with her guidance counsellor. Both parents reported a decrease in conflict at both post-group times compared to pre-group.

Group Two

Family #7. For this child, the main concern one of his parents indicated prior to the group was that he may be having difficulty accepting new step-siblings. His parent wanted him to feel more comfortable with having new family members. During the group, this child did not share much about himself or his family, but did participate in activities on families and finding similarities and differences between families' of other children in the group. Following the group, this parent reported that the relationship with step-siblings had improved. His other parent had wanted the child to participate in the group for the social aspect and to meet other kids.

In the child's interview following the group, he indicated that one of the things he liked best about the group was making new friends. He participated in activities in the group, shared drawings with the other kids, and interacted well with others. On the HSE, his score from the first session to the final session slightly decreased, suggesting that there may not have been an improvement in his self-esteem. His score from the pre-screening interview was not accurate, therefore, a comparison cannot be made. This child

did not complete the post-group CBAPS, however his pre-group score was fairly high compared to the pre-group scores of the other children. This may suggest that his beliefs about the separation were fairly accurate prior to the group.

There were no significant changes to his family situation over the duration of the group and the level of conflict reported by both parents was low prior to and following the group. At follow-up, one parent indicated that some behavioural issues (i.e., power struggles, questioning authority) had begun, but that these could also be attributed to a developmental change rather than to his way of dealing with the separation.

Family #8. There were no major concerns identified for this child prior to the group. One parent had indicated that they wanted her to be in the group to receive support from other kids and to make contacts with other kids for after the group. The other parent had wanted the group to help her feel more positive about the situation and to work on communicating her feelings. During the group, she participated in activities, including a role-play and got along well with others. She was able to share ideas with other kids on topics such as problem solving, using "I messages," and managing angry feelings. Following the group, she said she enjoyed the other kids and knowing she was not alone (in having separated parents). One of her parents indicated that she had been using "I messages" and had become more assertive in standing up for herself following the group. The other parent had not noticed any changes. Three of the children from this group, including this child, exchanged phone numbers in order to keep in touch following the group.

In terms of her family situation, one of her parents had remarried and she had

step-siblings. One change that had occurred during the group was that the other parent (who had not remarried) had moved out from living with a partner whom the child liked and this had caused some feelings of anger for the child. As well, there had been some issues for the child at school regarding problems with some of the other kids and this was having an impact on the child's behaviour. However, at follow-up, one parent reported that they felt the child was more confident and more sure of herself than had been noticed previously. In terms of conflict levels reported by parents, it was moderate-low prior to the group and following the group it was reported as lower than before.

Family #9. For this child, one parent had indicated that they wanted him to participate in the group to get to know other kids from separated families. The other parent had a similar reason, in addition to wanting the group to decrease any feelings of self-blame and to increase self-esteem. In the group, this child had no problem sharing his personal feelings or experiences with the other kids, even volunteering to do so at times. He got along well with the other kids and participated well in the activities. He was able to review the grief process for some children who had missed the session on that topic. There were indications that he still felt some blame for the separation but had accepted the permanency of the separation. There was an increase in his score on the CBAPS from pre-group to post-group, suggesting that his understanding may have become more accurate. In his advice to other kids whose parents had separated, he explained that they are not alone and that with time they will get over it.

Following the group, he indicated that he enjoyed meeting the other kids and wished there was more time in the group to talk with the others. His parents indicated following the group that they had noticed a change in terms of him testing boundaries and

standing up for himself more than before. This behaviour was reported to be continuing at follow-up, according to one parent, but the other parent had indicated that this behaviour had decreased at follow-up. One parent indicated that his self-esteem seemed to be the same, but suggested that it may have to do with his personality than the group itself. On the HSE, the change in scores was minimal and not in the expected direction. In terms of his family situation, prior to the group, there was a discrepancy between reported levels of conflict, with one parent indicating that it was high and the other parent indicating it was low. Following the group, however, both parents felt that the conflict level was low and that an effort was being made to keep conflict away from the child. For this family, the parents had attended mediation and the child was involved in a group at school for children with separated parents. There were no step-relations for the child. The main change reported following the group was that the family home was being put up for sale. The parents indicated that it was upsetting to the child at first, but once it had been sold the child had come to accept the change.

Family #10. One issue raised for this child by one of her parents prior to the group was that she took out her angry feelings using physical aggression. The other parent had wanted her to have a better understanding that the separation was not her fault and to be exposed to other kids in the same situation. In the group, this child did share her feelings with the other kids and participated in all activities. She got along well with most of the other kids and became close with one of the other girls. She was included in the group of girls who exchanged phone numbers. I noticed that she tended to have mood swings. For example, one week she indicated she felt "black" and coloured a sheet of paper all in black. The next week she drew a bright yellow sun, indicating that she was feeling good.

There was one instance where she told another child that that child was sitting in her chair and when that child left, this child wrote her name on some paper and put it on the chair. Based on her comments in the group, it seemed as though she was coping with her feelings and the experience and her "ups" and "downs" might have been related to the various feelings she was experiencing in trying to cope with the separation. Her score on the CBAPS showed the most dramatic increase from pre- to post-group.

Following the group, she indicated that she had enjoyed being with the other kids and found some of the anger management strategies to be useful. One parent reported following the group that they had noticed the child trying some different ways to deal with anger even if she showed some of the previous aggression. At follow-up, this parent reported that the aggression had decreased. The other parent reported at follow-up that they had noticed that the child's friendships had become more important to her. This could suggest that she felt more comfortable seeking out support and friendship of peers to help her feel better. In terms of her family situation, the conflict level was moderate-low before the group and was reported as lower following the group. One major change reported at post-group was that some relatives who had been living with her had moved out of her primary home and this was creating some mixed feelings for her. At follow-up, another change was that there was a step-sibling expected and that this child was excited about the new family member.

Family #11. This child was included in the comparison group data analysis for the HSE and was originally registered for Group Two. However, he did not actually participate in the group due to a conflict in his time-table for the evening of the group. His parents had been married and had separated in June, 2003. Both reported a low

conflict relationship, which was further indicated by the parents wanting to meet together with me prior to the group. At the time of the pre-screening interview, there were no step-family relationships or other major changes for the child. At the Time 2 completion of the HSE, the child had moved out of the family home to a new home and one parent had begun seeing a new partner. The child had the highest scores on the HSE compared to the other children at both times of data collection.

Family #12. This child was living in a sole custody arrangement and data was collected from that parent only. The parent had wanted the child to meet other kids whose parents had separated and to learn to communicate her feelings more as she tended not to open up about how she was feeling. In the group, this child got along well with the other kids, was very outgoing and seemed to have a lot of confidence (i.e., she was not afraid to stand out from the other kids or be the centre of attention). She did not share personal feelings or experiences, but did participate well in most activities. It was hard to get a sense of how she was coping because she was always very upbeat and cheerful in the group. She chose not to complete the CBAPS at the last session and her pre-group score did not stand out from the rest.

I learned that there were some issues going on for her regarding her family situation. The father who was involved in the separation was her step-father, although he had been the only father she had known. Around the time of the group, he was withdrawing from spending time with her and was spending more time with her younger brother (who was his biological child). Her mother reported that the child did not open up about how she was feeling about this and from her behaviour in the group I was not able to sense any problems. Her scores on the HSE showed a large decrease from pre- to post-

group, suggesting that her self-esteem may have been lower by the end of the group. It is possible that this change could have been attributed to the changes in her family situation. Her mother reported that it she had always kept her feelings to herself and it may be a personality trait that she does not communicate openly about how she is feeling. The conflict level reported by her parent was low so this may not have been a major factor for this child. No follow-up data was obtained from this parent.

Family #13. There were several factors for this child and family that made them stand apart from the rest of the families for this group. This child mainly kept to herself in the group and worked on her own. She did not take the initiative to speak with other children but when she did interact with others, it was usually positive. There was one instance where a child made a negative comment toward her, but it was difficult to tell whether or not this child perceived it as negative. She participated in activities and was very open when speaking with the co-facilitator or me one-to-one. Her score on the CBAPS showed a large increase from pre- to post-group, suggesting that her understanding of the separation had improved. As well, her scores on the HSE showed the most increase from pre to post-group, suggesting that this had also improved over the duration of the group. This child missed two sessions, which may have affected the extent to which she felt a part of the group.

Following the group, the child said that she did not really enjoy the group and did not feel as though she made any friends. There were some activities that she said she enjoyed, which were mainly individual activities. In meeting with the parents prior to the group, it was indicated that the main reason for placing her in a group was because it was recommended through a court assessment. Some concerns raised included wanting her to

understand that the separation is not her fault, help her deal with her feelings, and improve her self-esteem. The parents for this child reported moderate levels of conflict; however, it was mentioned that there was minimal communication and that there had been a restraining order in place at one time. This suggests that perhaps the actual level of conflict was higher than moderate. Following the group, one parent had not noticed any changes and felt that the child was doing well. In terms of changes in the family situation, it was reported that the child's mother was expecting a baby with a new partner. One issue that was raised following the group was that the child did not want to spend time with her other parent. At follow-up, this behaviour had gotten worse and there was more resistance shown by the child when it came to spending time with that parent. There was also an increase in anger reported for the child. Unfortunately, only one parent provided post-group and follow-up data so there was no balance of perspectives on how the child was doing. This parent had indicated an attempt to seek counselling for this child.

When one of her parents was asked whether the group was beneficial for the child, the response was the child went because "she had to," suggesting that there was parental pressure for her to continue going. In meeting with the children before the group, it was made known to them that if they decided they did not like the group or did not want to come anymore, then they did not have to. However, parents may be a larger influence in the child continuing to attend and this may have affected this child's enjoyment of the group.

Family #14. The separation for this child was the most recent of all the children in this group. The main reason reported by parents for wanting him in the group was to help him deal with upset, worried feelings. In the group, he got along well with the other kids

and was very positive and cheerful in general. There were some instances where he shared some of his personal feelings and experiences about the separation. One of the ideas that was brought up was that there may be a possibility of parents getting back together, suggesting that the permanency of the situation had not been realized. Both parents had indicated that there had been a brief separation several years ago (when the child was 8 years old) which may have played a factor in his belief in the possibility of reconciliation. Because of the recency of the separation, there may have been some feelings or experiences expressed by other children that had not yet occurred for him. His scores on the CBAPS showed a very large increase from pre-group to post-group, suggesting that by the end of the group his understanding of the separation had improved. Following the group, he said that he enjoyed the other kids and liked the fact that there were other children in the same situation as he was. His advice to other kids was to think of the positives in the situation, suggesting that this was how he was coping as well. One parent reported following the group that his worry about one parent had decreased following the group. At follow-up, information was obtained from one parent only and it was reported that the child was dealing much better with the separation. The conflict for the parents was reported to be low.

Family #15. This child withdrew from the group after the first two sessions and in speaking with one of his parents there had been some serious issues that had arisen for which they were seeking individual help for him. There were some differences in this family compared to others that may explain why the child withdrew. For example, the conflict level was high and there was a restraining order in place against one parent. One parent reported prior to the group that there were some problems with acting out and

anger management issues at home and at school. A similarity between this family and family #12 was that the child's father was not his biological father, but was the only father the child had known. The parents had been together 11 years and married for the last 5 of those years. In the first two sessions, the child seemed to enjoy the group and participated well in the activities and with the other kids. He did share some personal feelings and was aware that he needed to learn new ways to deal with his anger. However, there was not an opportunity to explore that issue.

Conclusions

There was an abundance of information to sort through to determine whether or not the children experienced any expected changes in their coping behaviour. However, with so few cases (e.g., 12 children who completed both groups) statistically significant findings were difficult to achieve. Specifically, because a group comparison method was used to evaluate and analyze the information, the sample sizes were reduced further. It may have been possible to achieve more significant findings had an individual clinical case study method been used. However, the purpose of this practicum was to evaluate group outcomes. When all the quantitative and qualitative data is combined for each child in the group, one is able to see that there were some expected changes that occurred and these were more apparent in certain children. For children where these expected changes were not so apparent, there were extenuating circumstances that may have played a role in how they were coping with their situations.

Most children appeared to show some level of understanding their family situation. Most children seemed to be comfortable interacting with the other kids, despite

certain children working on their own at times. Some children were better able to express their feelings than others but all children were able to express their feelings through pictures and art activities. In terms of learning more positive ways of behaving, some children did not immediately show any changes but were able to recall the skills they were taught. This understanding is a positive indication that they may be able to incorporate their knowledge into future behaviour. As mentioned earlier, it was not necessarily expected that children could immediately process and begin using the skills taught. For Group One, at follow-up (i.e., one month following the group) there was no indication by parents that the children were using the skills taught in the group. However, for Group Two, there were some specific examples of skills being used at follow-up, although this was limited to a small number of children. It is important to note that this method of data collection (i.e., parental observations) may not be an accurate measure of whether or not changes were actually occurring or if children were actually using the skills taught in the group outside the group setting. Overall, both parents and children had positive things to say about the group and the effect it had on the children. My conclusion is that each child benefited in their own way, whether it be a small or large change they experienced, learning something new, or getting to know other children in the same situation and seeing how other children are coping.

Outcome of Learning Goal Evaluation

The learning goals for this practicum included; (a) to develop a better understanding of the experiences of and interventions for children of divorce and separation, (b) to gain knowledge in small group processes and dynamics with this population, (c) to develop and use the skills required to facilitate an open and comfortable

group setting for the children, (d) to facilitate cohesiveness among group participants, (e) to teach the group participants in a way that improves their understanding of the divorce and to use the skills taught in the group, and (f) to develop and utilize the skills required for planning and evaluating the group intervention. The learning goals were evaluated in a variety of ways. These goals will be discussed in turn below.

(a) My knowledge about the experiences and interventions for this population was enhanced through the literature review, which was used to develop the rationale for the practicum as well as the content of the intervention. My knowledge was further enhanced in the actual intervention through comments made by children about their experiences and feelings. For example, children talked about feeling shock, blame, anger and sadness. As well, some children presented their concerns about being bothered by witnessing arguing or conflict between their parents and their feelings about parents being self-involved and having less focus on children. In terms of my knowledge of existing interventions, this was accomplished through a review of existing group programs for children and using that information to put together my own group activities and format.

(b) My knowledge of group processes and dynamics and group facilitation skills was evaluated in several ways. In terms of group process, a post-session reflection form was completed after each session. This provided an opportunity for me to assess what group process or dynamic was occurring and how it had changed from the previous session (see Appendix M). I applied Tuckman's theory on stages of group development to my assessment of the group process for each group (in Toseland & Rivas, 2001). This helped me to recognize changes in group dynamics as each group progressed from stage

to stage, as well as allowed me to compare the groups in terms of when they reached each stage.

In Group One, the beginning or forming phase lasted approximately three sessions. This involved the children being cautious, testing the boundaries by sharing neutral, non-personal experiences, and a slow increase in their participation in group discussion and activities. Through sessions four to six, the middle phase occurred with norming occurring around one child misbehaving and distracting other children. Another norm that developed was that one child was very open about sharing personal feelings while the other children listened. Some storming behaviours occurred around the two boys in the group testing the boundaries of the facilitators and what they could get away with during the group. The group began to show an increase in cohesion in working together on activities and talking with each other during breaks. Some small conflicts also developed as shown by subtle comments being made by some children during the sessions. The last two sessions demonstrated the ending phase where kids were becoming a bit more quiet at times, but were also talking about the upcoming final session. Some children began interacting more than previously and it was clear that there was a greater sense of being comfortable in the group. Closure came when all the children received certificates of completion.

For Group Two, these same basic processes occurred, however the timing and behaviours were a bit different. The beginning phase of being cautious and testing the boundaries occurred in the first session, however by the end of that session there was a difference in the interaction between the children in comparison with Group One. Session two involved some degree of forming, but there was a marked increase in sharing of

into practice with Group Two. For example, I ensured that adequate attention was given to the ground rules for behaviour in the group and referred to the ground rules often and when appropriate. This included rewarding behaviour that was consistent with following the ground rules. The second group worked much better on group discussion activities in addition to working on their own. Therefore, this type of activity was added into the sessions. For this group, I ensured I was conscious of the importance of letting the group process determine the flow of activities. If we spent longer on a certain activity than scheduled, I would revise the following session to accommodate that. From both groups, I learned that it is important to have both individual activities as well as group activities planned. This was required in order to provide an activity to a child who needed to take a break from the group, so he or she had something to work on related to the topic. I learned that some activities that were useful for one group were not as useful for the other. For example, using hypothetical scenarios for children to respond to with feelings and problem solving skills worked with Group One because they were less comfortable sharing actual experiences. With Group Two, however, they were very comfortable sharing their own experiences and feelings so the hypothetical situations were not necessary.

Another method used to assess my facilitation skills was through the children's post-group information. They were asked about whether I was easy to understand and whether I could have done anything different that would have made the group better. All kids indicated that the facilitators were easy to understand. Only one child suggested that it would have been better if I had done less talking and had more activities.

A final method for assessing my facilitation skills was through on-going contact with my on-site supervisor following each session to talk about what had happened, what I did, and what I could have done differently. This feedback was very useful for me and resulted in me needing to contact her less during the second group as I had learned to deal with various situations on my own.

(c) - (e) There were several learning goals with respect to the group environment and the children's learning of information and skills taught in the group. My own observations and information from children was used to assess this aspect. Certain questions on the child evaluation form (see Appendix I) and in the child post-group interviews (see Appendix J) explored the topics of how they felt about the facilitator, the atmosphere of the group, and the cohesiveness felt with the other children.

In terms of how comfortable the children felt in sharing their personal feelings and experiences, I found that in Group One, only a few children were open during group discussions while most of the children listened but did not share their feelings. In Group Two, it was the opposite situation where most children were very comfortable sharing with the group. This began early on in the group sessions. In gathering information about how the children perceived the group (i.e., whether they felt it was a place where they could talk about their feelings), only 2 out of 12 said they felt it was not a place where they could share their feelings.

Developing group cohesion was another goal for this practicum. My own observations of how the children interact with each other showed that there was some cohesion. In Group One, the group as a whole was fairly quiet and kept to themselves. However, there were dyads of children who seemed to get along well and choose to work

together on activities when it was not a requirement of the activity. In Group Two, there was more group cohesion; for example, most of the children got along well and chose to sit together during activities and breaks. One child in Group Two kept to herself, but this seemed to be a personal choice and not a reflection that the other children were not allowing her to interact with them. When she did talk with others, it appeared to be positive.

The children were asked about how they felt about working with the other kids in the group. For Group One, three children felt that they met kids with whom they could be friends and one child said what they liked best about the group was the other kids. For Group Two, all the children indicated that one of the things they liked best about the group was the other children, and three children indicated they met children with whom they could be friends with. In the post-group interview 11 out of 12 children said they enjoyed doing activities with the other kids.

The children were also asked to talk about what they learned in the group. This provided feedback about whether or not the children were able to understand the divorce more accurately or whether they learned any of the skills taught in the group. Most children indicated that the information we talked about in the group about separation was not new to them. They had heard it before from friends, parents, or guidance counsellors. However, two of the children said that it was helpful for them to hear the information again. In terms of the CBAPS scale, although no statistical differences were found in the scores, all scores were in the direction that would indicate that their beliefs had become more accurate by the end of the group. In terms of learning new skills, two children actually reported using some of the skills taught in the group ("I messages" and anger

management skills). This was supported by information from their parents. Most children were able to recall learning about "I messages," and some children recalled the anger management strategies; however, very few felt that the problem-solving skills were useful.

Certain activities were built into the content of the group sessions which evaluated the children's understanding and use of information and skills. For example, children were asked to participate in role plays where they would demonstrate use of "I messages." Only one or two children were able to demonstrate this effectively. However, when using these skills in closing circles, most children were able to do so.

One activity that was used to evaluate how children recognized the feelings experienced in the grief process was having children respond to hypothetical scenarios about how a child might be feeling in a particular situation. Most kids were able to recognize the feelings we had talked about. One child in Group Two was able to explain the grief process to other children who had missed the previous session on that topic.

Another activity involved the children sharing advice with other hypothetical children whose parents had separated. This was an opportunity to see if they would pass on some of the information taught about separation. Some of the messages from children in these groups included; "parents still love you," "parents probably won't get back together," "you are not alone," "one of the best things is that you get twice the presents," "one good thing is that you get to do different things with each parent after the separation," "you can talk to a friend you trust if you are feeling bad," and "try to look for the positives if you feel bad." This suggests that most kids were able to recognize and

recall some of the major topics covered about separation. However, it was interesting that no children specifically said in their advice that the separation was not their fault.

(f) The final learning goal was related to skill development in planning and evaluating a clinical intervention. This was achieved through the development of the group program content. I was able to use information from various existing programs as well as adapt some of the activities to make them fit better with the topic I was addressing. I also learned about the importance of preparing extra activities in the event that some do not take as long as expected or children are not receptive to it. As well, I was able to recognize what activities would work better with each group based on the personality and behaviour of the children as well as the group dynamic.

In terms of evaluating an intervention, this was achieved through my development of a data collection and analysis plan. I also feel that I was able to recognize some of the limitations to my evaluation method. This is important in helping me understand, based on my experience with conducting the intervention and the data collection, what aspects could be strengthened for future intervention evaluations. One weakness was regarding consistency in collecting information between both groups. For example, only one of the quantitative measures was re-administered to Group Two at the beginning of the group (i.e., HSE scale). As well, parents of children in Group Two were only interviewed once. In order to ensure that changes had or had not occurred over the period of time when the children were not receiving the intervention, parent interviews could also have been conducted closer to the beginning of that group.

A second weakness was with regard to my use of a parametric test (the t-test) with the small sample size. I feel that this created many limitations that prevented this test

from providing me with accurate information regarding changes in children's scores from pre- to post-group.

Implications

In this final section, I will discuss aspects of the practicum that were useful and those that could be improved for future programs. Where applicable, I will make suggestions of how important aspects of this practicum can be modified and used in current programs, for example, *Caught in the Middle* run by Family Conciliation (Pomrenke, 1996).

I found it very helpful to include parents in the evaluation process. One aspect that made this useful was that information could be transferred to parents. This information could be used by parents to help reinforce what was learned in the group. For example, prior to and after the group, parents were made aware of the topics being covered, what the children would be taught, and what they might expect to see in terms of their children's behaviour (e.g., using "I messages"). Whether or not parents actually used this information in the home was not assessed in this practicum.

The fact that many parents were interested in meeting with me following the group also suggested that the inclusion of parents was a helpful component. Most parents were interested in knowing how their children were doing. As well, parents specifically asked about what they could be doing to help their children cope better. Although the specific details discussed in the group remained confidential, there was general information that could be shared with parents about where their children were at in the adjustment process and where they seemed to be struggling. For example, if children expressed feelings of self-blame, the parents would be reminded that children can never

be told often enough that they are still loved by their parents, and that what is going on is between parents and not because of something the child did. The inclusion of parents allowed each parent to receive information specific to their child and their child's needs.

This parental interest was a positive aspect of the intervention. I would use parent interviews again in an evaluation of a children's program as parental behaviour has been shown to play a role in children's adjustment, as described earlier. If parents are not involved in the process, they may not have the opportunity to have their concerns addressed or learn information that may assist them in helping their child through the transition. As well, by being involved with parents, the facilitator can provide encouragement to them for taking active steps to help their child (e.g., through placing them in a program and following-up afterwards).

I found that the parent interviews required a lot of time and flexibility on the part of the facilitator to arrange and conduct the interviews. My experience was that with Group Two, because there were more children than Group One and because most children had two parents who were interested in follow-up meetings, giving parents the option of having this interview take place over the telephone was helpful to ensure all parents could be contacted in a timely manner. Therefore, a modification that could be made, one that may be more reasonable in terms of staff time, would be to have follow-up interviews be more informal and conducted via telephone contact. These follow-up contacts do not necessarily need to be as detailed as that used in the practicum, but could be an opportunity to provide parents with general information about how their child is doing or what areas their child may be experiencing problems in. It will also allow the

facilitator to hear from parents if they had any concerns about how their child is doing or how they felt the group contributed to helping their child adjust.

The intervention design, in terms of the content, number of sessions, and size of the groups, was effective. Most of the topics and activities were well-received by the children. Activities on problem-solving skills were less well-received of all of the topics. It seemed as though the educational aspect of this topic was difficult for children to make sense of. A cartoon drawing was used which outlined the steps in solving a problem. However, unless a very strong example was used, children did not seem to be able to concretely understand the theory behind the steps in the process. This drawback may be limited to the specific way in which the activity was taught in this practicum. It could be strengthened in future programs by using a more creative approach that demonstrates the problem-solving process more concretely for children.

The number of sessions was sufficient in order to get through all the relevant topics and allowed for some flexibility in the case of time running short in some sessions. However, I think that it would still be possible to run this group with fewer sessions, for example, six or seven. With this particular practicum, additional components were included in the first and last sessions (e.g., time for completion of scales) that may not be necessary to use in all programs. Had these not taken up so much time in these sessions, more material specific to separation or divorce could have been covered, alleviating the need for more sessions.

For the purpose of having an evaluation component that does not consume a large amount of session time, the evaluative tools used in this practicum could be modified and shortened for use on a regular basis to determine how groups are helping children.

For example, perhaps some general questions regarding children's self-esteem and beliefs about the separation could be put into a form given to children at the first group session (or possibly at the pre-screening interview). Although program developers can tailor the questions based on their specific goals for the program, these questions might include, "I am smart," "There are a lot of things I am good at," "my family (or my parents) are proud of me," "I have a lot of friends/most people in my class like spending time with me." The response to these can be in a simple "yes" or "no" format.

For questions relating to children's beliefs about the separation, these could be focused in several areas, including "I think that it is my fault that my parents decided not to live together anymore," "Deep down, I think my parents will get back together someday," "I think my mother/father is more responsible for the separation." Questions can also address children's feelings, such as "I feel sad/angry/happy/lonely." Responses to these questions should take a basic form that is easy for children to understand and easy for the facilitator to assess, such as "yes" "maybe" "no" or children can respond on a likert-type scale. These questions can be included in a post-group evaluation form, where children additionally can rate what they liked or did not like about the group. This will provide information that the facilitator can use for comparison purposes with information gathered at the beginning of the group, as well as for the group evaluation.

The size of Group One (six children) was a bit small. This was most noticeable after one child dropped out, leaving only five children. If a child was ill or away for a session, then the group was too small. For the second group, we started with eight children and even with one child dropping out, a child could be missing from a session and the size of the group would not be as affected as much.

As a general rule, I would suggest that starting out with more children is a better practice. However, the facilitator needs to keep in mind the specific issues each child may be bringing to the group. For example, if there are children who have been identified prior to the group as having serious behaviour problems or are known for being disruptive in group settings, the facilitator may want a small group in order to be able to properly manage the children or to give more attention to certain children if needed. The number of children chosen for a group will vary based on factors related to individual facilitators and to individual group members. As well, the purpose of the group will also play a role in what size is appropriate. For example, with a counselling/support type of group, fewer children are a better fit with the goal of the group. However, if the purpose of the group is educational, more children can be included in the group.

The evaluation methods used were useful. However, I do acknowledge that there were some areas where they could have been strengthened. The evaluation methodology and measures were selected prior to the beginning of the actual practicum. Once the measures began to be used in the practicum (i.e., the recruitment of children) and throughout the intervention, some weaknesses came to light. However, most of the methods used still allowed me to collect important and relevant information in addition to being able to compare information pre- and post-group. Consistency in obtaining information between groups was also helpful in allowing me to see similarities and differences between groups on the same measures.

One difference I would include in future evaluations is that all the information collected at the initial interview be collected a second time, prior to the beginning of the second group. This would be in cases where consecutive groups are being facilitated and

compared. In this practicum, one group was offered in the fall and the other offered in the winter. All parents were interviewed prior to the beginning of the first group in order to recruit enough children for both groups prior to beginning the intervention. There was a period of approximately four months between the parental interview and the beginning of the second group. Only one measure (the HSE scale) was administered at the initial interview and again at the beginning of the second group. I think that the evaluation could have been strengthened by interviewing Group Two parents again, just prior to the second group, to see if there had been any significant changes since the initial interview. Changes reported between the initial interview and the beginning of the group could be attributed to a number of factors (e.g., passage of time). This information would be important to know when assessing program effectiveness. In addition, there may be new issues or concerns that arise during the time between the initial interview and beginning of the second group that may be helpful to know prior to the beginning of the group. For example, if the same concerns are reported by parents at both times, and change occurs in these areas in a positive direction by the end of the group, the change may be more strongly attributed to the group and not the passage of time. Otherwise, the changes may have occurred prior to the intervention.

Another change I would recommend is that in future evaluations using quantitative data with a small sample size similar to mine (e.g., less than 30), a non-parametric test would be more appropriate. Non-parametric tests are less sensitive to violations of assumptions (e.g., normal distributions) that are normally required for hypothesis testing. An example of a non-parametric test that could be substituted is the Wilcoxon Rank-Sum test or Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test (Howell, 2002).

Generally speaking, I think that this group program was helpful for the children who participated. This is supported by comments made by the children and their parents indicating that this group was beneficial for the children. Most children seemed to enjoy being with the other kids and participating in the activities together. Most children showed some positive changes over the duration of the group as well as following the group. Although these were not always major changes, there were many small changes that were observed in children's behaviour and beliefs. For example, I noticed that certain children's behaviour changed as the group sessions progressed. As well, some parents reported that their children's behaviour and general well-being had improved following the group. In same cases, these changes were maintained up to one month following the end of the group.

To summarize, many of the aspects of this practicum and the intervention were positive and it did help many children and families cope with their family situation. As with any evaluation, there are aspects that could be strengthened or added to the design if this type of intervention and its evaluation were to be replicated. The design and content of a children's program will depend on the individual goals and objectives of the program. These objectives will also determine the type of setting in which the program would be implemented. As a learning experience, this practicum contributed to my understanding of this population, the issues that are present for families, and the thoughts and feelings that children have. My learning and understanding of this population has increased both through a review of the literature as well as through working directly with parents and children in this population. My understanding of the logistical and practical aspects of groups and evaluations has also increased. In addition, I have seen first-hand

how the process of groups with children unfolds and is shaped by the individuals as well as the facilitators participating in the group. Overall, this type of practicum provided an excellent opportunity to learn an array of skills and knowledge and gain valuable experience in planning, facilitating, and evaluating a group program.

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Appendix A

Letter to Parent with Primary Parental Responsibility (Custodial)

Dear Parent,

I am a student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba. I will be running a small support group for children whose parents have separated or divorced. This is intended to help children understand and adjust more effectively to the separation of their parents. This practicum will be used toward finishing my degree requirements and has received approval from the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board.

I am looking for children between the ages of 9 and 12 whose parents have separated or divorced within the last two years to participate in this group. Groups will be held in the fall of 2003 and winter of 2004. This group will be a place for children to meet and share their feelings with other children who are going through a similar experience. The group is intended to help children develop a better understanding of their parents' divorce or separation, to learn constructive ways of managing their feelings, dealing with anger, and resolving problems, and to feel better about themselves and their family situation. Your child will be asked to fill out some brief questionnaires as pat of this group, however your child will not have to answer any questions he or she does not want to. Your child is free to withdraw from the group at any time without consequence.

This group will be co-facilitated by myself and a Social Work student doing a placement at Family Conciliation. Because this program is being used as a learning experience, I will be supervised by an employee from Family Conciliation as well as faculty members at the University of Manitoba.

If you are interested in having your child participate in this group or would like to discuss this further, please fill out the information below and leave the bottom portion of this form with Family Conciliation. You can also contact me at the number below.

Thank you for your time.

Heather Morris, B. A. (Hons.), MSW Candidate

(phone number)

Name: _____

Contact Number: _____(Daytime) _____(Evening)

Best time to contact you: Daytime   Evening

Appendix B

Letter to Other Parent (non-custodial)

Date

Dear Parent,

I am a student in the Master of Social Work program at the University of Manitoba. In conjunction with Family Conciliation, I will be running a small support group for children whose parents have separated or divorced. This is being used as partial fulfillment of my degree requirements. This practicum has received approval from the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board.

Your child _____ (name) will be participating in this group and consent has been given by your child and his/her other parent. The group will run in (Fall 2003/Winter 2004). This group will be a place for children to meet with other children who are going through a similar experience and to share their feelings. Your child will learn about separation/divorce and skills for expressing their anger, solving problems, and communicating feelings. It is hoped that this group will help children cope better with their new family situation.

This group will be co-facilitated by myself and a Social Work student doing a placement at Family Conciliation. Because this group is being used as a learning experience, I will be supervised by an employee from Family Conciliation Services as well as faculty members at the University of Manitoba.

I am willing to meet with you to discuss this further or to answer any questions you may have about this group. Please feel free to contact me at the number below to discuss or to set up a meeting time.

Thank you,

Heather Morris, BA (Hons.), MSW Candidate

phone number

Appendix C

Community Resources

The Family Centre
4th Floor-393 Portage Ave
947-1401

Elizabeth Hill Counselling Centre
3rd Floor- 321 McDermot
956-6560

Child Guidance Clinic
2nd Floor-700 Elgin
786-7841

Men's Resource Centre
203-321 McDermot
943-4182

South Winnipeg Family Information Centre
800 Point Road
284-9311

Aulneau Renewal Centre
601 Aulneau
987-7090

Appendix D

Pre-Group Interview Questions (Parent)

(Discuss confidentiality issues)

1. Tell me about your family situation, when the separation occurred and what your child's experience has been. (Screening for recency of separation and witnessing of family violence)

2. What is the current arrangement for the time your child spends with you and their other parent?

3. On a scale of 1 to 10, with one being low and 10 being high, how would you rate the level of conflict between you and the other parent at this point in time?

4. Tell me about your child, their personality, what they like to do, what they don't like to do. (Used to incorporate activities into the program)

5. Have you experienced your child to show excessive shyness or aggressiveness/acting-out in group situations? Has your child been diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder?

6. Why do you want your child to participate in the group, what do you hope your child will gain from this group? (focus on social relationships with friends, communication of feelings, aggressive or acting-out behaviour, coping skills in general, will be used to compare with post-group interview information)

7. Do you have any questions about the group?

(Review and discuss consent form)

Appendix E

Consent Form

Principal Investigator: Heather Morris, phone number

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brad McKenzie, phone number

The purpose of this practicum is to facilitate a small therapeutic and educational group for children whose parents have separated or divorced. It is expected that this group will help children cope better with their parents separation. This practicum will be used toward my Master of Social Work degree. It has received approval from the University of Manitoba Joint Research Ethics Board. Any complaints regarding any aspect of this practicum can be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122.

Children between the ages of 9 and 12 whose parents have recently separated or divorced within the last two years will be asked to participate in this group. Between 6 and 8 children will be in the group. Eight weekly group meetings will occur, each meeting lasting 1.5 hours. This group will be a place for children to meet and interact with other children who are going through a similar experience and to talk about their feelings. The children will learn more about separation/divorce to help them understand it better. They will also learn skills for anger management, problem solving, and communicating their feelings.

Age-appropriate activities and discussion will occur around issues children experience during their parents' separation. However, there is a potential for children to initially experience stress and anxiety by focusing on their feelings about their family situation. It is believed that the children will ultimately benefit from being able to express their feelings and receive support from other children in a similar situation. As well, by helping children better understand the divorce/separation and learn skills for handling problems, this will help them cope better with the separation.

The specific information discussed by the children in the group will remain confidential with the exception of disclosure of child abuse/neglect or intention to harm one's self. Information about children and their families will be kept confidential and under lock and key at Family Conciliation. The group sessions may be videotaped for the learning purposes of the group facilitator or as part of an activity for the children. All videotapes will be kept under lock and key as well and will be erased upon completion of the group.

There is an evaluation component built in to this practicum, so your child will be asked to complete questionnaires prior to and following the group. As well, information gathered from parents and children prior to and following the group will be used for evaluation purposes. All information gathered will be kept anonymous and no identifying information will be contained in the evaluation report.

Your child's participation is voluntary and he/she has the right to participate in the group to the extent to which he/she feels comfortable and to withdraw from the program at any time. Your child is also free to avoid answering any questions he/she does not feel comfortable answering.

If you consent to having your child participate in the program, please fill out the information below.

I _____ (name) give consent for my child _____ to participate in the children's group being run by Heather Morris. I verify that I am giving my consent voluntarily. This practicum has been explained to me and I have received a copy of this consent form. I understand that my child can withdraw from the program at any time.

I would like to obtain a summary of the final report of this practicum.
Yes   No

If yes, please include your mailing address below:

_____
_____
_____

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____   Date: _____

Appendix F

Pre-Group Interview Questions (Child)

(discuss confidentiality issues, explain group)

1. Do you have any questions about the group or what will happen in the group?

(informed)

2. What things do you or don't you like to do? (help structure activities in group)

3. Are there some things you would like to do/learn in the group? (help structure activities

in group)

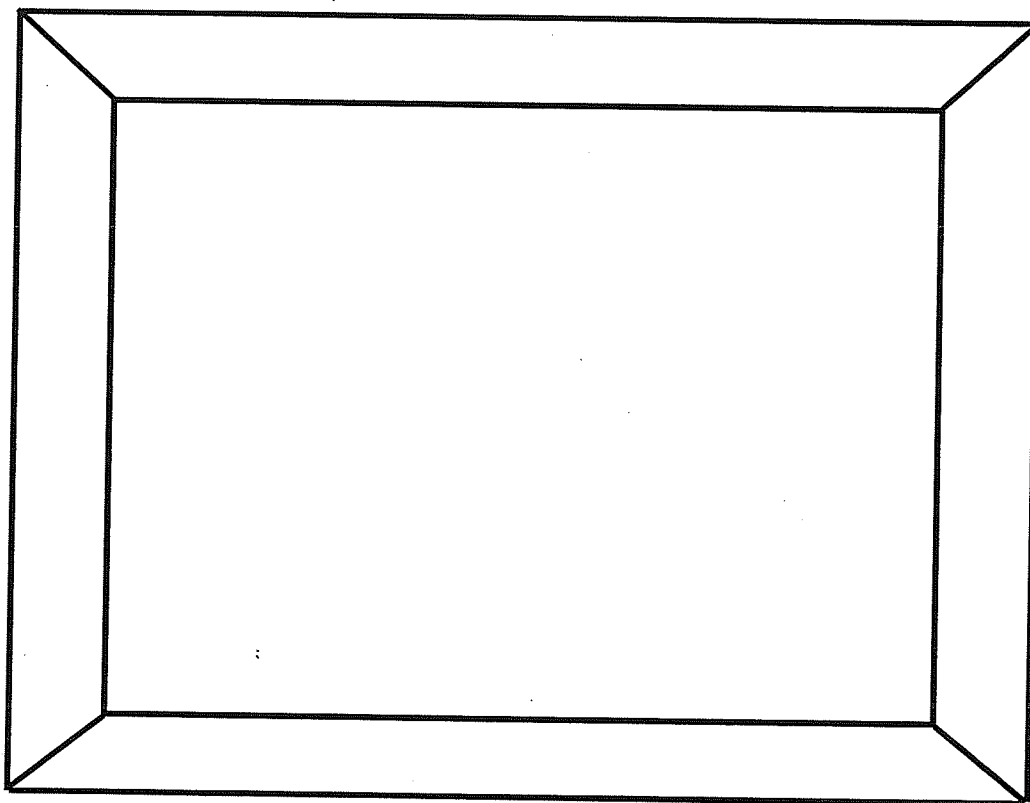4. Do you want to participate in this group?

Appendix G

"All About Me" activity

(adapted from Calgary Counselling Centre, 1985b)

ALL ABOUT ME!

Here is a picture of me doing my favourite activity:

1. My hair colour is
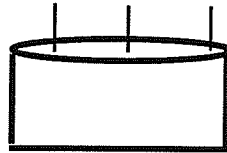
_____

2. My eye colour is

_____

3. I have freckles   yes
                     no

4. My name is

┌───┐
│   │
│   │
│   │
└───┘

5. I am a   **boy**   *girl*

6. My birthday is

Day _____   Month _____   Year **19** _____

☆   Today,   I am _____ years old   ☆

☆   and in grade _____   ☆

More About Me...

Things I like:

My favourite animal is _____

My second favourite animal is _____

If I could be any animal, I would be _____

because

_____

I have a pet ?

        yes   no

                    My pet is

        _____

My favourite food is _____

The one kind of food I hate is _____

My favourite sport to watch is _____

        I don't like to watch sports

My favourite sport to play is _____

        I don't play any sports

My friends:

MY BEST FRIEND'S NAME IS _____

MY BEST FRIEND IS A

                BOY   GIRL   PET
SOMETHING ELSE

MY FAVOURITE TEACHER IS _____

     BECAUSE

_____

MY FAVOURITE NEIGHBOUR IS _____

MY ROOM:

I share my room with

            no one   a brother or sister   a pet

The wall colour is _____

I have _____   _____   _____   _____ on my walls
     pictures   posters   art   something else

It has _____ windows and _____ closets

The thing I love about my room is _____

If I could change one thing about my room, it would be _____

ALL ABOUT MY NEW FRIEND

My new friend's name is: _____

Learn 3 things about your new friend and write them below:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Appendix H

Anger Worksheet

Sometimes I get so angry...

1. What are some examples of situations that make you feel angry?

2. Are their certain people who make you feel angry?

3. How do you know when you are angry? Do you notice any changes in your body or in what you are thinking?

4. What usually happens when you feel angry? How do you behave?

5. What are some other ways you could behave when you feel angry?

6. Circle any answers below that you think are good ways to behave.

Ignore the person, leave, walk away

Consider the consequences, is it worth it?

Take 5 deep breaths/ cool down

Count to ten

Say something to yourself to calm down (For example)

"I'm in control"

"I'm not going to let things get to me"

"I can deal with this situation"

Something else? what?

Appendix I

Post-Group Evaluation Form

(Adapted from Spencer & Shapiro, 1993)

1. Did you enjoy participating in this group? (satisfaction with group)

2. What things did you like about the group?

3. What things didn't you like?

4. What things would you change about the group for the next time it is offered? (what children find useful or not, to be incorporated into second group)

5. Did you feel that you could discuss your family and your feelings?

6. What information did you learn about divorce and separation? (learning information)

7. Did you learn some skills that you will use after the group is over?

If you did, what skills will you use? (learning of skills)

8. Are there some things you would have liked to talk about in the group that we did not talk about? (for second group)

9. Did you feel comfortable talking about your feelings in front of the group? (atmosphere)

10. Did you meet other children who you feel you could be friends with after the group is over? (cohesion, social support)

11. Did you find the group leaders easy to understand? (facilitation skills)

12. Do you have any suggestions for what the group leaders could have done differently that would have made the group better for you? (facilitation skills)

Appendix J

Post-Group Interview (Child)

1. Did you enjoy participating in this group? (satisfaction with group in general)

2. What things did you find most useful about the group?

3. What things would you change about the group for the next time it is offered?

4. Did you feel comfortable expressing your feelings? Why or why not? (safe and

comfortable atmosphere)

5. Did you enjoy talking to and doing activities with the other group members? (cohesion)

6. Did you learn something new about your family situation? What did you learn?

(learning of information)

7. Did you feel you learned some skills that you can use after the group? What skills do

you think you will be able to use after the group is over? (learning, transfer of skills)

8. Is there something I could have done differently that would have made the group better

for you? (evaluation of facilitation skills)

Appendix K

Post-Group Interview Questions (Parent)

1. Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour since participating in the group? (Refer to specific issues raised prior to group, focus on social relationships with friends, communication of feelings, aggressive or acting-out behaviour, coping skills in general)

2. Do you feel your child benefited from this program? (effectiveness/satisfaction with program)

3. Have there been any significant changes in your family situation during this intervention? (check for external factors that may affect changes in child)

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, one being low and 10 being high, how would you rate the level of conflict between you and the other parent at this point in time?

5. Do you feel your child would benefit from further intervention? (referral)

Appendix L

Follow-Up Interview (Parent)

1. Have you noticed any changes in your child's behaviour since the end of the group?

(refer to original list, outcomes that took longer to emerge)

2. Have the changes reported at the end of the group been maintained? (enduring

outcome)

3. Have there been any significant changes in your family situation since the termination

of the group? (external factors influencing child's changes)

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, one being low and 10 being high, how would you rate the level

of conflict between you and the other parent at this point in time?

5. Do you have any concerns about your child's well-being/further intervention? (referral)

Appendix M

Session Evaluation Form

(Adapted from Spencer & Shapiro, 1993)

Session # 1

Session Goal Attainment

1. How successful were you at explaining the group purpose and how it will function?

2. How receptive were the group members to the introduction process?

3. How cooperative were the group members in completing the self-esteem scale?

Group Participation

1. Identify those students who were most active in the group process.

2. Identify those students who were least active in the group process.

3. Which strategy was the most effective in facilitating group interaction and participation?

4. Which strategy was least effective?

5. What things could you have done to improve the session?

6. Will you change anything as you prepare for your next group session?

7. Specifically, how will you start your next group session?

Learning Goal Attainment

1. Did the children express their feelings and experiences with the group?

2. Did the children appear to interact positively with each other (cohesion)?

3. Did children learn and understand the information/skills taught to them in the session?

4. What group process or dynamic was apparent in this session? How has it changed from previous sessions?

Session # _____ (2-8)

Session Goal Attainment

1. How successful were you at explaining the goals and activities?

2. How receptive were the group members to the topic and activities?

3. How cooperative were the group members in participating in activities?

Group Participation

1. Identify those students who were most active in the group process.

2. Identify those students who were least active in the group process.

3. Which strategy was the most effective in facilitating group interaction and

participation?

4. Which strategy was least effective?

5. What things could you have done to improve the session?

6. Will you change anything as you prepare for your next group session?

7. Specifically, how will you start your next group session?

Learning Goal Attainment

1. Did the children express their feelings and their experiences?

2. Did the children interact positively with each other (cohesion)?

3. Did children learn and understand the information/skills taught to them in the session?

4. What group process or dynamic was apparent in this session? How has it changed from

previous sessions?