

“Family Transitions Triple P”: The Theoretical Basis and Development of a Program for Parents Going Through Divorce

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ABSTRACT. Divorce is a major life stressor and life transition for parents and children. It places parents and children at risk of developing psychological problems that can have long-term negative consequences for children. Family Transitions Triple P is an adaptation of Triple P–Positive Parenting Program that has been specifically developed to address risk factors and enhance protective factors for parents who are divorced. This paper presents the rationale, theoretical foundations, historical development, and distinguishing features of this program. The multilevel intervention promotes parental self-sufficiency, self-efficacy, self-management skills, personal agency, and problem-solving skills to promote short- and long-term positive outcomes for children and parents after divorce. doi:10.1300/J087v47n03_07 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce is a significant life stressor. Half of all divorces in Australia in 2005 involved children. Of these, 24.3% of divorces involved families where the age of the youngest child was less than 5 years, 36.4% between the ages of 5 and 9 years, and 39.3% older than 10 years (ABS, 2005). With the rate of divorce greater for second and subsequent marriages, and the mean time between divorce and remarriage being 3.7 and 4.2 years for men and women, respectively (ABS, 2004), it is likely that some children will experience more than one divorce in their family prior to the age of 18, increasing their exposure to significant stressors.

Experiencing parental divorce as a child has been linked to increased risk for short- and long-term problems. The short-term problems can include emotional, behavioral, and academic problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Kline, Tschann, Johnston, & Wallerstein, 1989). In the long-term, children of divorced parents have been found to have gained less education, earn lower incomes, have greater marital discord, have poor relationships with their parents, and experience more psychological distress than children whose parents did not divorce. Furthermore, divorce has been linked with problems in the children of the children whose parents divorced (i.e., the third generation) including lower education, increased marital discord, and poor parent-child relationships (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

Divorce, however, is not uniformly harmful to children and most children of parents who divorce develop into well-adjusted adults. Divorce is often accompanied by other significant life stressors in a family, such as changes in work, school, living conditions, finances, conflict, social support, and time spent with children. The potential of divorce, and related changes in a family's life, to become a harmful stressor, depends upon the level of uncertainty over the impact of the changes and the chronicity of the stressors (Bryce, 2001), that is how smoothly family members make appropriate adjustments and develop a new stable family life.

Role of Family Factors

The capacity of parents to make a smooth transition through divorce and develop a positive co-parenting relationship with their ex-partner has been found to mediate the impact of divorce on children. Children whose parents have joint custody following divorce demonstrate better adjustment across multiple domains compared with children in sole custody (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999; Bauserman, 2002; Grych & Fincham, 2001; Kelly, 2000; McLanahan, 1999).

Dysfunctional communication patterns are correlated with partner alienation and intractable conflict (Retzinger & Scheff, 2000). Co-parental conflict has been demonstrated to have a significant impact on the father-child bond and the ongoing involvement of fathers in their children's lives (Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2000). Furthermore, inter-parental hostility can undermine the benefits of continuing contact with both parents.

Conflict is an almost universal experience for parents who divorce as they attempt to establish new family structures and process the emotional issues involved in divorce. While the potential for post-marital discord between parents is high for all couples during the first few months following divorce, the literature distinguishes between normative conflict and enduring conflict. Up to 12% of couples continue to engage in high levels of conflict many years after divorce, being unable to resolve anger or hateful feelings (King & Heard, 1999). Aggressive communication styles predict the use of an adversarial pathway for divorcing couples (Rudd, 1996). These parents often demonstrate immature and inappropriate coping skills, being extremely reactive, blaming, and view extreme conflict as normal (Mathis, 1998). Entrenched, enduring conflict can prevent parents from reaching parenting agreements and consequently this minority of parents utilizes disproportionate court resources and time (Kelly, 2003). In addition, after becoming locked into the adversarial system, parents can find it difficult to transform themselves into cooperative participants of a court-ordered, shared parenting contract (Turkat, 2002). Separating parents, who are unable to resolve their conflict place enormous burdens on the court and adversarial systems, limit the effectiveness of primary dispute resolution strategies, and contribute to poor outcomes for children (Christophersen & Mortweet, 2003; Garber, 2004; O'Connor & Dvorak, 2002).

Research indicates that parenting processes (e.g., discipline, monitoring, positive attention and involvement, and problem-solving) are at risk

of deterioration in divorcing families (Anderson, Lindner, & Bennion, 1992; Brody, Neubaum, & Forehand, 1988; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; DeGarmo, Forgatch, & Martinez, 1999; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Vuchinich, Vuchinich, & Wood, 1993). Furthermore disruptions in parenting routines and parents experiencing personal stress have been associated with increased use of ineffective parenting strategies, which in turn have been linked with child behaviour problems and poor child adjustment. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, using multiple methods of assessment that included direct observations of divorced parents, have found moderate to strong pathways from ineffective parenting to children's adjustment problems (Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1989; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Forgatch, Patterson, & Ray, 1996; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, & Anderson, 1989; Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993). Following divorce, children benefit most from regularity, consistency, and continuity (Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson, 1999).

Stress, poor communication skills, and conflict impair the ability of parents to separate their own needs from those of their children, establish co-parenting arrangements, maintain good parent-child relationships, and be able to re-negotiate with their former spouse in the future without the need for litigation. It also undermines the quality of parenting, the affective responsiveness of parents to children, and styles of discipline. The extensiveness and durability of psychological problems for children and parents, as well as the financial costs to the community, owing to ongoing litigation between parents, highlights the importance of theoretically-driven, evidence-based interventions to promote positive transitions through divorce for parents and children.

DEVELOPING AN INTERVENTION TO PREVENT NEGATIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

Risk factors are associated with an increased probability of onset, greater severity, and longer duration of major mental health problems. *Protective factors* refer to conditions that improve a person's resistance to risk factors and disorders. They have been defined as those factors that modify, ameliorate or alter a person's response to some environmental hazard, such as divorce, that predisposes them to a maladaptive outcome (Rutter, 1985). Risk and protective factors for mental health problems have been well-documented (WHO, 2004). The literature clearly supports the contention that how children adjust through the

transition of divorce in their family is not determined by a sole individual or child factor, but highlights the importance of the child's social ecology in promoting healthy adjustment following divorce. Table 1 summarizes risk and protective factors across systems that a child is embedded within that are particularly related to outcomes for families following divorce. The aim of effective prevention and early interventions for mental health problems needs to reduce risk factors, strengthen protective factors and decrease psychiatric symptoms and disability (WHO, 2004). For ethical reasons and to make optimal use of limited resources, interventions need to target the key risk and protective factors that are both modifiable and have the greatest capacity to affect change across systems in which the child is living. For this reason, prevention and early interventions for families going through divorce need to target parents and strengthen their capacity to work together to make a smooth transition through divorce and provide an ongoing stable, consistent and loving environment for their children, thereby enhancing child protective factors and reducing risk factors.

TABLE 1. Risk and Protective Factors for Children Following Parental Divorce

	Risk	Protective
Child	Parental mental illness Family conflict or disorganization Parental substance abuse Stressful life events Child abuse or neglect Academic failure	Prosocial behavior Feelings of security Good parenting Positive parent-child interactions Positive attachment Problem-solving skills Stress management Self-esteem Stress management Feelings of mastery and control Exercise Ability to face adversity Autonomy
Parent	Isolation Lack of education Chronic insomnia Emotional immaturity and dysregulation Family conflict or disorganization Loneliness Work stress Unemployment Isolation and alienation Peer rejection	Social support Conflict management skills Stress management Feelings of mastery and control Exercise Ability to face adversity Autonomy Problem-solving skills Self-esteem Socio-emotional growth Social participation
Family	Poverty	

HISTORY AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Parenting and Family Support Centre at The University of Queensland developed Family Transitions Triple P in response to a growing demand from consumers and courts for parenting programs to enhance parenting skills of divorcing parents. There is an increasing recognition in Australia and other western countries that prevention and early interventions are needed for divorced parents with an aim to move them away from a trajectory of entrenched conflict and enhance their capacity to meet the needs of their children without resorting to litigation (Australian Government, 2006; Geasler & Blaisure, 1999). Traditional parenting programs are not tailored to meet the needs of parents who often have limited contact with their children, nor do they address the mediating factors that can impair the capacity of parents to implement positive parenting strategies.

Despite the proliferation of parent programs for divorced parents, few have been rigorously evaluated (Deacon-Wood & McIntosh, 2002; Geasler & Blaisure, 1999; Whitworth, Capshew, & Abell, 2002). Many currently available programs are not derived from a clear theoretical background, cover a range of topics without clear links to risk and protective factors for parents and children; and only a minority use teaching strategies that have been demonstrated to lead to change in parent behaviors (Geasler & Blaisure, 1998). Kirby (1998) identified key characteristics for interventions for divorced parents: (1) multiple levels of intervention; (2) active skills training; (3) experienced facilitators/clinicians; (4) appropriate content; and (5) effective teaching strategies.

The broad goals of Family Transitions Triple P are to provide parents with skills to enhance their co-parenting relationship with their ex-partner, manage their own emotions, develop a new family identity, and implement positive parenting strategies with an overall aim of minimizing the impact divorce has on a child's development and promote healthy adjustment.

Many of the ideas and principles incorporated in Family Transitions Triple P have been informed by the divorce literature and evidence-based strategies for particular problems, some of which are listed here: (1) The principles of a positive family transition through divorce were derived to reflect the challenges parents face when they are going through divorce and the priorities they need to focus on to reduce the negative impact of divorce; (2) Cognitive-behavioral strategies have been included to help parents take responsibility for and manage their own emotions, which are often the primary drivers for ongoing entrenched conflict between parents and impair the capacity of parents to use assertive parenting; (3)

Conflict management, assertive communication and problem-solving skills have been added to provide parents with skills and guidelines to assist in developing and maintaining an effective co-parenting relationship with their ex-partner; (5) Strategies are provided to help parents develop a new family identity and develop adequate social supports which are essential in helping parents move through the transition of divorce and establish a new family life; and (6) Positive parenting strategies used in Group Triple P (Sanders, Markie-Dadds, & Turner, 2001) are expanded upon to include ideas for parents who have limited contact with their children but are wanting to foster positive relationships with their children and manage problem behavior when it arises.

Theoretical Basis

Family Transitions Triple P has the same theoretical and conceptual basis as other parts of the Triple P system (Sanders, 1999). It draws strongly on the following theoretical foundations:

1. *Social learning models of parent-child interaction.* This theory highlights the bi-directional and reciprocal nature of parent-child interactions (Patterson, 1982). It identifies the learning mechanisms that maintain coercive and dysfunctional family interactions and also predicts future antisocial behavior in children (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). According to this theory, parents influence children's behavior positively by rewarding behavior with attention, rewards, or time with a parent. Parents can also inadvertently encourage negative behaviors such as non-compliance or aggression by rewarding it with attention or attempts to negotiate with a child. Similarly, parents caught in entrenched conflict are rewarded with attention from their ex-partner by ongoing litigation or demands. A further feature of negative family interactions is the use of coercion (Patterson, 1982). In a coercive interaction, the aversive behavior of one person reduces or eliminates the aversive behavior of the other. If, for example, a child complains and whines when given an instruction, the parent may stop insisting that the child follow the instruction. The child is rewarded by not having to do the aversive task, but the parent is also rewarded by not having to listen to the complaining. The long-term effect is that both the original aversive behavior, the complaining, and the removal of parental demands are likely to reoccur (Patterson,

- 1982). Family Transitions Triple P teaches parents positive child management strategies such as using logical consequences to backup requests, as an alternative to coercive parenting practices. It also teaches parents how to develop and maintain co-parenting relationships by using assertive communication skills, problem-solving and parenting plans as an alternative to hostility or litigation.
2. *Child and family behavior therapy and applied behavior analysis.* Research in these areas has identified useful behavioral change strategies. Research that has focused on rearranging antecedents of problem behavior to prevent difficulties by providing positive, engaging environments for children and adolescents has been incorporated into Family Transitions Triple P (Risley, Clark, & Cataldo, 1976; Sanders, 1996).
 3. *Developmental research on parenting in everyday contexts.* Family Transitions Triple P is influenced by the notion of the parent-child relationship as the foundation for developing children's competencies (e.g., Hart & Risley, 1995). The program encourages parents to teach their children developmentally appropriate skills that will promote resilience, for example, communication skills, coping with emotions, adjusting to change and problem solving.
 4. *Social information-processing models* emphasize the impact parental cognitions such as beliefs, expectations, and attributions have on parental self-efficacy, decision-making, and behavioral intentions (Bandura, 1977, 1995). Parental attributions are targeted in the program by encouraging parents to identify alternative social learning explanations and therefore modifiable explanations for their ex-partner's and their child's behavior.
 5. *Developmental psychopathology research.* This field has identified additional risk and protective factors which are linked to adverse developmental outcomes and psychopathology in children and adolescents. These include co-parental conflict, and parental distress such as depression and stress (Amato & Keith, 1991; Kline et al., 1989) The Family Transitions Triple P program aims to foster collaboration and teamwork between parents in their role of raising their children. Improving parental communication is effective in reducing conflict over parenting issues and in reducing the distress of both parents and children (Sanders, Nicholson, & Floyd, 1997). Family Transitions Triple P also addresses parental distress related to divorce and parenting issues by helping parents develop more effective parenting skills and which in turn leads to reductions in feelings of helplessness, anger, depression and stress through in-

creased parental efficacy. As a Level 5 intervention, which is an enhanced level of the program draws on cognitive-therapy techniques such as mood monitoring, challenging dysfunctional thoughts and attributions, and developing coping strategies.

6. *Public health perspective.* A public health perspective to family intervention acknowledges the importance of the role of the ecological context for child development (Biglan, 1995; Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994; National Institute of Mental Health, 1998). Biglan (1995) underscores the importance of a community context for changes in parenting in order to reduce antisocial behavior in children and adolescents. The Family Transitions Triple P program aims to change the broader ecological context of parenting through its Level 1 media and promotional strategy. Its aim is to normalize divorce as a family transition, particularly the process of participating in parenting education, breaking down social isolation, increasing social and emotional support from others in the community, and publicly validating and acknowledging the importance and difficulties of parenting. It also actively seeks involvement and support for the program by engaging key community stakeholders, for example, community leaders, businesses, schools, and voluntary organizations.

Parental Competence

A fundamental tenet of Family Transitions Triple P is a focus on long-term outcomes. Enhancing a parent's capacity for self-regulation is central in developing parental competence and is emphasized in Family Transitions Triple P. Parents need to be able to select developmentally appropriate goals for their child and goals for changes necessary in their own behavior, implement appropriate strategies to meet their desired outcomes, in addition to identifying and modifying their own performance and setting goals in the future. Interventions that have the capacity to improve self-regulation are more likely to have enduring effects that prevent relapse once treatment is ceased (Hollon et al., 2002). Within the developmental framework, parents aim to promote self-regulation in themselves and their child so that he/she can function competently once adulthood is reached. The self-regulatory framework of Triple P (Sanders, 1999) has been operationalized to include:

1. *Self-sufficiency.* As a parenting program is time-limited, parents need to develop skills to be able to problem-solve independently,

trust their own judgment in relation to parenting and become less reliant on others in carrying out their parenting responsibilities. The program aims to give parents the skills to be resilient, resourceful, and have the knowledge and skills to parent confidently. Self-sufficient parents have the ability to seek appropriate support when required and be able to develop strong social support networks. They will also be an active part of their child's life by advocating for their child; being involved in their schooling and protecting them from harm.

2. *Parental self-efficacy.* Self-efficacy refers to a parent's belief that they can resolve parenting or behavior management problems when they arise. Parents with high self-efficacy have positive expectations about their ability to parent and cope effectively.
3. *Self-management.* Parents develop skills that allow them to set their own goals, select appropriate intervention strategies, monitoring their own and their child's behavior, self-evaluate their performance based on strengths and weaknesses against self-selected criteria.
4. *Personal agency.* Parents are encouraged to attribute improvements in behavior to changes in their own or their child's efforts rather than as the result of uncontrollable or external factors such as chance or maturation.
5. *Problem solving.* A final, but essential part of a parenting intervention is for parents to be able to generalize the skills and strategies learned for a current problem and be able to apply them flexibly to new and novel problems that arise in the future.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

Family Transitions Triple P is a behavioral family intervention that is grounded in empirically supported theory. Its underlying principles are drawn from decades of research identifying causal models that identify the interrelationships between key risk and protective factors that contribute to the development of behavioral and emotional problems in children following parental divorce. Family Transitions Triple P forms part of the Triple P—Positive Parenting Program which is a system of parenting and family interventions for parents of children who have or are at risk of developing behavioral or emotional problems (Sanders, 1999).

Family Transitions Triple P aims to use both a risk reduction and resilience development approach to intervention and prevention. It aims to target the multiple factors that put children at risk of poor outcomes following divorce. By enhancing parental coping, communication, and conflict management skills, reducing dysfunctional parenting styles and parental adjustment issues, Family Transitions Triple P aims to remove processes and factors that have been implicated in the development of problem behaviors in children. There is also an emphasis on encouraging parents to build skills and competencies in their child that will enable the child to successfully negotiate high-risk environments, that is, enhancing their child's resilience. The overarching objective of Family Transitions Triple P is to increase parental competence and confidence in making a positive transition through divorce.

Family Transitions Triple P group program is a 12-week active skills training intervention that has been developed as a selective or indicated prevention program targeting parents whose children are at a significantly higher risk of developing problems following divorce as evidenced by psychological or social risk factors or where family members have minimal but detectable signs or symptoms of a mental health disorder. It is recommended that Family Transitions Triple P be delivered as a Level 5 enhanced individual treatment for parents who have significant mental health issues or long-standing entrenched co-parental conflict.

The Family Transitions Triple P has three components. The first five sessions of the program focus on parent issues that impact on children following divorce which include: strategies for making a positive transition through divorce; how to manage emotions; conflict management and communication skills; and balancing work, family and play (Stallman & Sanders, 2006). The following four group sessions are from Group Triple P and include: effective parenting strategies; how to promote children's development; how to manage common child behavior problems; and principles to manage high risk situations (Sanders et al., 2001). The program includes three brief, weekly telephone consultations after the group sessions to help parents tailor the program to their own needs, as well as promote generalization and maintenance of skills.

Key parental competencies that are emphasized in the program are summarized in Table 2. These focus on empowering parents to make changes to their own behavior to lead to greater stability and control in their lives and the lives of their children, thereby reducing the both the quantity and chronicity of stressors. The program promotes child development and emotional self-regulation needed to function effectively. These are summarized in Table 3. Child risk factors, such as poor

TABLE 2. Parent Competencies Promoted Through Family Transitions Triple P

Promoting a Smooth Transition Through Divorce

Putting the needs of children first
 Being aware how one's own actions impact on children
 Developing an effective co-parenting relationship
 Communicating appropriately with children
 Setting up life as a single parent

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills

Taking responsibilities for one's own emotions
 Expressing feelings in ways that do not harm others
 Managing anger, anxiety, depression and stress
 Taking care of yourself

Co-Parenting Skills

Expressing thoughts and opinions in ways that do not harm others
 Having child-related discussions
 Developing a parenting plan
 Responding to anger

Problem Solving Skills

Defining a problem and setting goals
 Considering alternative solutions
 Negotiating and compromising
 Making decisions and accepting consequences

Balancing Work, Family and Play

Building a new family identity
 Increasing social support
 Requesting assistance or help when needed
 Setting priorities
 Developing new romantic relationships

Parenting Skills

Developing positive parent-child relationships
 Encouraging desirable behavior
 Teaching new skills and behaviors
 Managing misbehavior

communication and problem-solving skills, are addressed by teaching parents how to encourage the social skills needed to function effectively. Achievement of these skills will promote positive relationships between the child and their parents, peers and the wider community.

EVIDENCE BASE FOR TRIPLE P

Triple P has been subjected to ongoing rigorous scientific evaluation for more than two decades using multiple-baseline across subjects and randomized control designed studies for children aged 1-14 with behavioral problems. It has been found to be effective in reducing child

TABLE 3. Child Competencies Promoted Through Triple P

Social and Language Skills

Expressing views, ideas, and needs appropriately
 Requesting assistance or help when needed
 Cooperating with adult requests
 Cooperating with others in family, school, recreational activities
 Being aware of the feelings of others
 Being aware how one's own actions affect others

Emotional Self-Regulation Skills

Expressing feelings in ways that do not harm others
 Controlling aggression, impulsiveness
 Developing positive feelings about oneself and others
 Accepting reasonable rules and limits

Independence Skills

Learning to do things for oneself
 Completing tasks and being involved in age appropriate activities without the need for constant adult supervision
 Being responsible for one's own actions

Problem-Solving Skills

Showing an interest and curiosity in everyday things
 Asking questions and developing ideas
 Considering alternative solutions
 Negotiating and compromising
 Making decisions and accepting consequences

behavioral and emotional difficulties of children with mild developmental disabilities displaying oppositional behavior (Roberts, Mazzucchelli, Studman, & Sanders, 2006; Sanders & Plant, 1989); oppositional and conduct disorder (Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully, & Bor, 2000); recurrent abdominal pain (Sanders, Shepherd, Cleghorn, & Woolford, 1994); recurrent headaches (Beames, Sanders, & Bor, 1992); oppositional and conduct problems (Markie-Dadds & Sanders, 2006); persistent feeding difficulties (Turner, Sanders, & Wall, 1994); attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Hoath & Sanders, 2002); stepfamilies (Nicholson & Sanders, 1999); and developmental disorders (Roberts et al., 2006).

In addition, Triple P has been demonstrated as an effective intervention for families living in rural and remote areas (Connell, Sanders, & Markie-Dadds, 1997); parents who have been notified for child abuse (Sanders, Pidgeon, Gravestock, Connors, & Brown, 2003), parents who have concurrent marital conflict with child behavior difficulties (Ireland, Sanders, & Markie-Dadds, 2003); and for early adolescents with behavioral problems (Stallman & Ralph, 2006).

Family Transitions Triple P group program is currently being evaluated using a randomized control trial with parents reporting key risk

factors such as difficulties with co-parental conflict, coping with emotions, or child behavior. A feasibility study is also underway to assess the suitability of the enhanced individual program as an intervention for parents with entrenched long-standing conflict who are caught in the use of litigation to manage their ongoing co-parenting relationship.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Family Transitions Triple P is a child and family-centered intervention. It has a number of distinguishing features which are described below.

Program sufficiency. This concept refers to the notion that parents differ according to the strength of the intervention they may require to enable them to independently manage a problem. Not all parents who submit an application for divorce require a broad focused intervention. Similarly, a brief informational session is not going to meet the needs of parents who have high levels of co-parental conflict, emotional distress, poor communication skills or poor parenting skills. Family Transitions Triple P aims to provide the minimally sufficient level of support and intervention that parents require. For many parents, Level 1 Family Transitions Triple P which provides parents with advice and parenting tip sheets may constitute sufficient intervention. Parents with significant problems with their relationship with their ex-partner, coping with emotions, or child behavior may require a more intensive broad-based group intervention. Other parents who have long-standing entrenched conflict and significant difficulties across both child and parent issues may require a more intensive intervention. Potentially effective programs for divorce parents vary in complexity, including strength, intensity, and scope of the intervention, the setting in which it takes place, who delivers the intervention, and the cost of delivery. The aim is to offer the most cost-effective program that is accessible to the largest number of at-risk families.

Flexible tailoring to address identified risk and protective factors. Family Transitions Triple P provides a variety of strategies for parents to choose from and tailor to their particular circumstances, to enable specific risk and protective factors to be addressed. The individual program in particular allows the practitioner to adapt the program to the parent's goals and family circumstances. Tailoring the program to the needs of each individual family requires knowledge of the parent's

goals for themselves and their family, as well as family strengths including resources and social supports, sources of stress and areas where there are problems.

Varied delivery modalities. Several levels of Family Transitions triple P can be delivered in a variety of formats, including group, face-to-face, telephone-assisted or self-directed programs, or a combination of modalities. This flexibility enables parents to participate in ways that suit their individual circumstances and is particularly useful for divorced parents who frequently have high attrition rates from group programs. It also facilitates participation from families in rural and remote areas who typically have less access to professional services and therefore makes it difficult for courts to order attendance at appropriate programs.

Multidisciplinary approach. Family Transitions Triple P was developed as a professional resource that can be used by a range of professionals who provide services to divorced parents. These professionals can include relationship counselors, community nurses, family doctors, occupational therapists, psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists. Emphasis is placed on training and supervision for professionals to enhance their parent consultation skills.

Training for generalization of parenting skills. A key focus of all Family Transitions Triple P strategies is to train parents to generalize the skills developed throughout the program to new problems or situations that might arise. There are four strategies employed to promote generalization of skills.

1. A *guided participation model of information transfer* is used to discuss assessment information with parents and to develop a shared understanding of the problem and possible contributing factors. This model involves providing descriptive, factual information and opportunities for parents to process and react to the practitioner's inferences and reasoning. The sharing of this reasoning provides a model for parents to examine causal inferences they make about a situation with their ex-partner or their child's behavior (Sanders & Lawton, 1993).
2. A *self-regulation approach* is used to promote parents' independence, confidence and future problem solving. Parents are taught skills to modify their own behavior. These skills include selecting goals for their child or themselves, monitoring their child's or their own behavior, considering the function of the problem behavior, choosing and implementing an appropriate method of intervention,

- and self-monitoring implementation. Parents are encouraged to identify strengths or limitations in their performance and set future goals.
3. A *sufficient exemplar* approach is used to teach skills. This involves selecting one behavior problem (e.g., yelling at ex-partner) to teach parents new skills. Additional exemplars are then introduced (e.g., feeling pressured at work) until the parent can apply the skill to behaviors for which they have not received specific instruction.
 4. Training is *conducted loosely*. This involves varying the stimulus context for training. Diverse examples are used to illustrate the application of skills to different situations. The aim is to help parents apply their skills to varied and novel situations rather than learning to apply specific management skills in a specific situation. The group program, where parents have different aged children and differing durations since their divorce, is especially useful in helping parents identify how skills can be used in different situations.

ISSUES IN PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Specialists delivering Enhanced Family Transitions Triple P interventions should have sound knowledge of child development, divorce, family and psychopathology; have skills in the application of social learning principles to child behavior problems; and have experience in the use of cognitive-behavioral techniques in working with adults. The program employs an active skills training approach for which comprehensive training and ongoing supervision of practitioners using the program is strongly recommended. To be an accredited provider, completion of a structured Family Transitions Triple P training program is required. This training includes detailed instruction in the theoretical and conceptual basis of the program, techniques for behavior change, and practical instruction in the management of therapeutic process issues that arise in the working with divorced parents.

Managerial commitment to Family Transitions Triple P strongly influences treatment fidelity and therefore the effectiveness of the program. The staff require high-level training and supervision to develop necessary skills and background knowledge required to deliver Family Transitions Triple P effectively. Guidance and specific agency protocols regarding client screening; allocation of cases to specific program levels or interventions; and clinical decision rules for referral to specialists such as clinical psychologists for more intensive intervention, need to be established.

CONCLUSION

Divorce is a major stressor for parents and children and is accompanied by other life changes. The capacity of parents to make a smooth transition through divorce is essential to building resilience in children and limiting the negative impact of divorce on their development. Family Transitions Triple P is a behavioral family intervention that is clearly linked to risk and protective factors for families going through divorce. It involves the application of a self-regulatory framework to an active skills-based approach to enhance the capacity of parents to make a smooth transition through divorce and develop and maintain a positive co-parenting relationship with their former spouse. The program uses high quality resources and materials to provide models and examples of how strategies can be applied to a diverse range of problems. This approach aims to build the skills and competencies of both parents and their children to cope with changes associated with divorce in positive, developmentally appropriate ways and to adjust to new family structures. Further independent evaluation and replication across sites would be valuable and will provide the essential strong evidence base for Family Transitions Triple P as an effective intervention to prevent negative outcomes for children following parental divorce.

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