

Kids ‘n’ Dad Shared Support – Founding Partner in the Family Renewal Project

A Collaborative of Like-Minded Agencies Supporting Changing Family Relationships

Programs are designed to support separating and changed families to maintain or rebuild healthy relationships in changed family arrangements.

The project (FRP) has been developed for separating/separated parents who are committed to ensuring that their children have both parents positively involved in their daily lives. The FRP will honour each family’s unique way to make that a reality; but every child, in the short and long-term, will know that committed, involved parents will continue to love and support them as the family undergoes renewal.

‘Best practices’ from researchers and clinicians form the underlying basis for all educational and support programs of the Family Renewal Project. In addition FRP is founded from the on-the-ground experiences of Kids ‘n’ Dad Shared Support and the lessons derived that a workable, step by step, two involved parents’ plan can be created for every family.

The Family Renewal Project is based on a core belief, namely:

- That arriving at an enduring best practices parenting plan is best achieved through the support of clinicians and educators passionately committed to positive outcomes for children and families.

Barbara Coloroso and Isolina Ricci are leading experts in the field of child welfare in separation and divorce. Included are two short excerpts from Ricci’s landmark “Family Bill of Rights” and Coloroso’s “What Kids Need to Hear” from Parenting through Crisis.

The values captured in these two short selections underpin this project and all of its programs. Ultimately the mission is to provide the programs and services that empower families to grow through the challenging period of separation and divorce.

A New Family Bill of Rights (Isolina Ricci: Mom's House, Dad's House)

- Each child has the right to have two homes where he or she is cherished and given the opportunity to develop normally.
- Each child has the right to a meaningful, nurturing relationship with each parent.
- Each parent and child has the right to call themselves a family regardless of how the parent's time is divided.
- Each parent has the responsibility and right to contribute to the raising of his or her child.
- Each child has the right to competent parents and to be free from hearing, observing, or being part of their parents' arguments or problems with one another.
- Each parent has the right to his or her own private life and territory and to raise the children without unreasonable interference from the other parent.

What Kids Need To Hear (Barbara Coloroso: Parenting Through Crisis)

- They still have a family.
- They will have two homes, one with Mom and one with Dad.
- Both parents will always love them and take care of them.
- The kids did not cause the divorce. This is an adult problem.
- They will not be left in the dark about any decision that will affect them.
- Their feelings will be acknowledged and considered. However, the adults will make the decisions, based on the children's best interests.
- They will not be asked to choose one parent over the other, to act as a messenger or as a spy.
- They will not be treated as another piece of property to be fought for, bargained over, or seized.
- They will have the financial support of both parents.

The challenge for the Family Renewal Project is to provide comprehensive programs that support the needs of separating parents and their children.

That is our commitment to your family!

Courses

Everything You Never Wanted To Know About Separation But Need To Ask

Rationale: "What happens to your children in the long run is not governed by events at the breakup but by what occurs in the post-divorce and remarried family."
(Judith Wallerstein: What About the Kids)

This is 6-hr. (3x2hrs.) course offered three times yearly.

Topics covered include:

- Talking to your children about separating in an age appropriate way;
- Recognizing your child's challenges amid your own grief;
- Developing a parenting strategy and parenting plan for your family;
- Community Support- What does your family need;
- The ripple effect- consequences for extended family and friends;
- Legal options
- Equalization +
- Every question that you never wanted to ask;
- Referral to other community programs and courses.

You 're Still Dad Support Group

Rationale: "The greatest gift you can give your child is the sense that you are a 'forever father' who's deeply committed to parenting."

(Judith Wallerstein: What about the Kids)

This is a 12hr. (6x2hrs.) course offered 3 times yearly.

Topics Include:

- Understanding the separating process.
- What type of dad have I been and what kind of dad do I want to be?
- What changes do I need to make in these changed circumstances?
- Understanding my children's needs at this time and stage of life.
- Depression, self-harm behaviors; etc.
- A new relationship with mom.
- Obstacles that you keep coming against in trying to be dad.
- New Partners for mom or me. Complications! Help!!!!
- A thousand other things...

The education and support group format combines professional expertise and the day-to-day experiences of participants. The facilitators bring both aspects to the group format.

You're Still Dad- Parenting Basics

Rationale: "A father's job is to carry the child to the top of the mountain and face the child away from home to the bigger landscape."

(Excerpt from Judith Wallerstein: What About the Kids)

A dad must learn the parenting skills to build a 'dad's home'. Intact homes often have a division of parenting roles; separation demands that dads master the necessary skills to be with their children, hand-in-hand and step-by-step in climbing to the peak.

This is an 8 hr. (4x2hrs.) course offered 3 times yearly.

Topics Include:

- Staying positively involved- your parenting challenges.
- Creating quality time- the importance of play at every age.
- Inexpensive but joyful activities.
- Co-operative parenting- situations that lead to conflict.
- Knowledge gaps- medical care, prescriptions, diet/cooking.
- Seeking support- community resources.
- What makes a home?

You're Still Dad- Canada: A New Canadian Dad's Dream or Nightmare?

Rationale: Canada presents itself as a multi-cultural society that is enriched by different cultures. Yet the Canadian approach to family life suggests that certain, longstanding practices in some cultures are unacceptable. Many of these practices present specific challenges for the father's relationship with his wife and their children.

This is a 4-week (4x2hrs.) course offered twice yearly.

Topics Include:

- Parenting styles of dads. Identifying your style. Finding the right mix.
- Importance of Father Involvement to achieve positive outcomes for children.
- Expectations clash- Identifying specific parenting struggles? Brainstorming solutions.
- Expectations clash- the changing expectations of his wife.
- Parenting skills- infant care, child development, importance of play, medical care, etc.
- Making it in the community- challenges to self and family.
- Reconciling the best of two worlds- is it a dream or nightmare?
- Community help.

My Family Matters.... Too!

Rationale: "We are the ones who have fallen through the cracks and there is no real support within the system for us. Some days we simply agree that this is just how it has to be and other days we have some fight left. We are being worn down!"

(From a 'subsequent mother')

In the separation process the new partner to a non-custodial parent (usually a dad) receives less attention than any other participant in the separation/divorce dance. The descriptive phrases of "second best" or "second rate" have been replaced with an equally disturbing term. A "subsequent family" is far down the pecking order and this has serious risks for parents and children from newer families.

This is a 4-week (4x2hrs.) course offered 3 times yearly. Participants may determine that a once monthly support group should be created from the course.

Topics Include:

- Identifying personal and partnering challenges.
- Exploring the issues around blended families in a non-custodial family.
- Couple exercises. Being good to each other.
- Conflict Resolution. Communication styles of partners.
- Financial issues- job loss, child support, spousal support, budgeting, etc.
- Fears and hopes!
- All other topics i.e. gaps in living standards of two families; addictions/depression; moving on somehow; life's just too complicated; I want to have children; etc.

You Have Support...Always! A support group for adolescents from separating and changed families.

Rationale: 'I was alone a lot as a child.' (Anonymous- adolescent from a split family)
Research: Children of divorce are three times more likely to be expelled from school or to become pregnant as teenagers as those from intact families; they are five times as likely to live in poverty.

Adolescence is perhaps the most difficult developmental stage for children from families experiencing a breakdown now or at an earlier time. The separating parents' best intentions may be lost in their own struggles to make it through this 'crisis of a lifetime'. The consequences may be young people making poor choices and engaging in destructive behavior that will place them and others at risk and impact on their future.

This is a 12 hr. (6x2hrs.) course offered bi-weekly 2 times a year. A monthly support group may follow this course. In addition a related program for the parents and a teen-parent mediation program may become part of the comprehensive program needed by families with tweens and teens.

Goals;

- To support adolescents through whatever the behavior of their parents;
- To learn how to make good decisions for themselves; to be comfortable in their own skin; communication skills;
- To have a positive, supportive relationship with both parents and extended families wherever possible; parent-teen mediation will be made available;
- Different common and not so common experiences will be examined.
- To provide on-going support following the actual program; strength is recognizing the need for help and seeking it.

The following workshops are open to the public and members from different support groups.

Family Renewal Project (FRP): Supporting Changing Family Relationships

To launch the project, Town Hall meetings will be held that include a presentation of the vision of Family Renewal Project followed by a Q&A.

Rationale: Our community too often fails separating families because our support is focused on dealing only with already done damage, too late in the separating process. The Family Renewal Project is about reaching parents 'sooner than too late' and providing family first education and support based on best practices. The KND vision for our community will be set out and the research and promise of other models will be discussed.

The Town Hall format is designed to raise community awareness and support for the Family Renewal Project.

The session is 2 hrs. and will run as often as requested in year one.

Money Matters Pt. 1 & 2

Rationale: 'Marriage is in part about building family assets; divorce is about subtracting and dividing family wealth!' (Anonymous: from parents who have been in that place)

At a time when the focus should be on children and personal and family renewal, the issues involving family assets, family income and family law often creates more crises and make the best interests of the children and family more difficult to attain. The two-part course will attempt to provide education about the separating process and common problems and solutions that are parent friendly i.e. prevent further conflict. It will also deal with other ongoing matters e.g. budgeting; financial implications of a new partner; wills; rebuilding family assets; etc.

This workshop will be held twice yearly or as often as needed.

Grandparenting through Your Child's Separation

Rationale: "I had to stop going to my friends and neighbors because of course they had pictures of their grandchildren throughout their home. It simply hurt too much and I found I couldn't carry on for some time afterwards."

“I had to visit my nieces and nephews. They knew I was a good person and let me play with their children.”
(From two paternal grandparents)

Grandparents are often mentioned and then quickly brushed aside in most separation proceedings. Yet they may face more complex challenges than either of the involved parents because of the different relationships that exist i.e. parent to a damaged mom or dad; relationship to their grandchildren may be at stake; relationship to the other parent; relationship to their own partner. These are only part of the grandparent story.

This workshop will be offered twice yearly to the public. The workshop will be offered directly to Senior Centres and Senior Residential Homes.

Father Involvement Does Make A Difference

Rationale: “My father never talked to me about how to treat people. Every act of kindness I have ever shown another person was because I was trying to imitate him.” (Pamela McGrew)

The role of a dad has gone through many changes through the generations. Only recently has research focused on the outcomes for children when there is a positively involved dad as opposed to an absent dad. This workshop will focus on the role of fathers, different parenting styles and a father’s important role through play with his child at different ages and stages.

This workshop will run 3 times a year or as requested.

Family Renewal Project- Employers-Why It Matters To Your Bottom Line?

Rationale: “ I am torn by my concern for my employee (colleague) and my obligation to ensure good outcomes for my business.” (Owner of a small business)

Many employers face the very human dilemma of being caught in the middle. This workshop will help educate a manager about what a separated parent is often going through in this crisis of a lifetime. It will examine possible community services that managers or H.R. departments should know in order to support employers and to prevent more negative outcomes for employees. This would include the vision of the

Family Renewal Project. The presentation will examine the unique problems in the workplace for newly separated families i.e. parent friendly policies.

Finally this workshop will examine ways to blend two apparently conflicting choices into a win/win option.

This workshop will be offered as often as requested and will be customized to meet the specific audience. This audience should include employers and service clubs.

Father Involvement in our Schools = Good Outcomes for Children

Rationale: This workshop focuses the non-custodial parent on how to become part of their child's school community- on why the school is an important part of creating a dad's home. The workshop will also deal with teachers or schools who resist a two-parent approach to reporting on a daily basis. The workshop will examine ways to improve a child's outcomes through two-parent involvement at the school.

The workshop will be offered as often as requested.

Adult Children of Separation and Divorce

Rationale: This is another audience that is often neglected or ignored by service providers. Young adults are expected to be able to cope with the parents' decision and adapt to these changed circumstances. Many from this age group 'blame' one of their parents and as such may become a 'caregiver' for the other parent. They also have to deal with the personal impact on their lives and many simply abandon one or both parents for their own life.

This audience often has to deal with long gaps in their relationship with one parent and blame feelings on both sides. If they have started their own family the relationship or non-relationship with one grandparent is complicated for the changing family.

Specific Targeted Audience:

- a) Parents separated after their children's teen years- young adulthood or later
- b) Parents separated in your childhood years with an outcome of a fadeaway relationship with one parent.
- c) Adult son or daughter wanting to renew a 'lost' relationship.

This workshop will run as often as deemed appropriate. It could reach a targeted audience of college and university students.

*** See general comments at the conclusion.

My Best Friends Just Separated.... How Do I Support Them? Help Please!

"We were best friends. We bought our houses together; we had children at the same time; we would have done anything for each other. Sadly my separation changed that forever."

Rationale: Rarely supported or even widely acknowledged, friends and extended family are often caught in the separating couples struggles. What that means for

significant others are challenging and important with many complex issues emerging, including:

- Loyalty, abandonment, and loss;
- Challenges you as role models to your children;
- Precipitate your own partnering crisis.
- Factors around dealing with different perspectives (gender, no-fault, etc.,) will be discussed.

The bottom line is that friends and close relatives play an important role in determining the success of a separating couple and their children's transition to a mom's house and dad's home. The risks are sometimes such that friends retreat/disappear with long-term, negative consequences for their friends and themselves.

This workshop will be offered 3 times a year or as often as necessary.



Comments on Programs Offered

1. All our programs are focused on achieving positive, two-parent involvement in the daily lives of every child.
2. The courses need a community partner and sponsor.
3. The workshops may be offered by KND only; however community partners and sponsors may be found for most programs.
4. A course to prevent family violence in the separating family will be developed based on the research of Dr. Edward Kruk (University of British Columbia).
5. Counselling expertise needs to be found to help re-unite a parent and child following a prolonged interruption of a 'normal' parent-child relationship. This specific counselling expertise may also be used to help birth parents and adopted children to have a positive relationship following a contact. This is now a significant concern following changes in Ontario's adoption laws re: access to birth parent or child information.
6. Additional Service Needs: Many dads and moms are dealing with their own special needs i.e. depression, anxiety disorder; life threatening diseases; etc. These illnesses pose a threat to 'normal parenting' especially for a desired Mom's House, Dad's House scenario following a separation. Specialized services may include: a) driving a parent to and from access; act as a supervisor to a parenting access; providing a residence for weekend access for a non-community parent; etc.
7. Additional Specialized Workshops could include: a) Parent Alienation Syndrome (end of April- PAS Day); b) Medical Care – Basic First Aid + Drug Care; c) Parenting Plans only; d) Myers-Briggs; e) Self-esteem building for men; etc.

N.B. Additional programs and workshops will be developed as necessary provided they fulfill the mission of the Family Renewal Project- namely- **that every child will have both of their parents positively involved in their daily life.**

“What happens to your children in the long run is not governed by events at the breakup but by what occurs through time in the post-divorce and remarried family.” (Judith Wallerstein, What About the Kids)