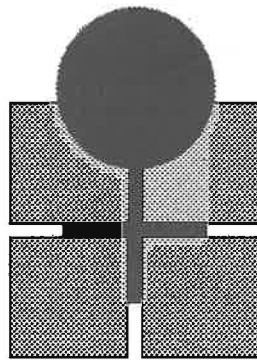


**Feminist Research, Education, Development & Action  
Centre**



**FREDA**

**PARENTING SUPPORT GROUP FOR  
WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED ABUSE**

**FACILITATOR'S MANUAL**

**by**

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## **SECTION ONE**

**HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL:** The manual is divided into four sections.

### **Section One**

This section will provide you with background necessary to design and implement a parenting support group. It includes a history of the programme and outlines some of the things you need to think about before you organize and run a group. A description of the special skills required of facilitators is also provided. This section stands alone and could be used as a model for the planning of any group.

### **Section Two**

This section is specifically designed to provide a structure for the parenting group sessions while allowing enough flexibility for you to adapt the information to your own needs. It contains an overview of the programme, a description of beliefs and objectives and a suggested itinerary for a ten-week series of group sessions.

There are several individual session outlines provided and each deals with a specific topic. Each session outline comes with a corresponding set of suggested exercises and handouts that, when combined, provides an example of how a two-hour weekly session might be structured.

For example, if you decide upon a session that deals with anger, you can use the session outline with anger as its topic for your guide. You can then turn to the corresponding set of exercises and handouts and choose the ones described in the session outline example, or choose any of the exercises/handouts provided that would best suit the needs of your group. The chosen activities can then be slotted into your two-hour session.

Each session outline is designed to stand alone and can be used in any order within the ten weeks. You can also create a custom designed session by mixing, matching and adding new activities. The group members are a good source of new ideas for topics and their suggestions should be encouraged.

### **Section Three**

Section three consists of two areas. The first, titled "Setting Boundaries and Limits," contains suggestions about how to maintain an appropriate professional relationship with participants while facilitating a supportive, feminist group.

The second area, titled "Taking Care of Ourselves," discusses the potential effects on facilitators who work in this traumatic area over a period of time. Strategies for self-care are outlined and warning signs of burn-out are discussed.

### **Section Four**

This is the resource section. It provides listings of books, a video, and contains suggestions on how to go about finding resources which might not appear in the manual.

## **HISTORY OF THE PROGRAMME**

The Parenting Support Group arose from a research programme in which a first study of women who had experienced abuse, identified parenting as a major issue. The mothers had cognitive awareness of their children's needs, but wanted someone else to handle their children as they had no emotional reserve left to deal with them.

Moms coming from abusive situations have many issues to deal with that affect their ability to parent. In general, these issues may include:

- Behaviour difficulties with children (acting out, depression, anger, over compliance, etc.)
- Need for ongoing contact with the children's father – visits, court contact, custody issues, etc.
- Their own unresolved issues, for example: depression, anger, having a child that physically resembles the ex-husband, etc.

A second study involved talking with the children coming from abusive relationships. In doing so, it was revealed that the kids needed their mothers; in particular, they needed to talk about what they had experienced. It was found, however, that the mothers were too stressed, tired and angry to connect emotionally with them.

Based on these findings, it was determined that a parental support group could be developed that would focus on helping moms make an emotional connection with their children. It was hoped that by doing so, there would be an increase in the mothers' feelings of competence and a resulting decrease in the stress of parenting. A spill-over effect on the children would ultimately be an increase in self-esteem and coping skills.

## **ARE YOU READY TO RUN A GROUP?**

In running a group of this nature, there are specific needs that have to be addressed. The following is a list of items that will help determine your preparedness to run a group.

- You will have to determine the demand for the programme in your area (advertising, etc.). You can approach relevant agencies such as transition houses, community health units or other single parent groups to check whether there are enough clients. It is difficult to run an effective group with less than four, or more than eight to ten women.
- A group of this nature has special safety issues to consider. A woman's ex-partner may be looking for her or following her, and for reasons such as this you will need a secure, central (yet discreet) location within easy reach of transit.

- A room large enough for eight-to-ten people is required, with an area for babysitting if this service is going to be provided.
- You will need at least two facilitators (preferably three to cover for illness, etc.). They must be experienced in running groups, have a strong background in work with abused women and have an understanding of feminism. The facilitators need to know each other and work well together, see Facilitator Skills.
- You will need a funding source and/or a sponsoring agency. You will need space to run the programme and, depending on how you choose to structure the programme, you may need to pay babysitters and facilitators.
- You need to decide whether you are charging a fee for the programme, or not charging, as some agencies have chosen to do. Others have sought alternate funding so that they can not only offer a free programme to the women, but also subsidize the women's babysitting payments and bus fare, or offer free babysitting.

## **ORGANIZING A GROUP**

Some of the issues that need to be considered in organizing a group are:

1. How many weeks will your programme run? A minimum of eight weekly sessions is required, with twelve being optimal.
2. How will the facilitators be paid?
3. How many participants will you have in each group? A minimum of four and a maximum of eight to ten is required.
4. How will you structure the sessions?
5. How will you advertise the programme? Places to advertise could include:
  - local media (radio, tv, newspapers)
  - supermarkets
  - medical offices
  - community centres and gathering places
6. A screening procedure for participants will be required.  
Women dealing with too many crisis issues at one time may need one-on-one counselling first, before they would receive any benefit from group work.
7. Policies with regard to attendance, lateness, confidentiality, etc., will need to be developed.
8. Will you charge the participants; or provide a free service?
9. Will you offer babysitting services, and if so, will you provide babysitting payments?
10. Will you offer transit payments?
11. What will be the best time of day and year to run this programme? How many times a year?

## **FACILITATOR SKILLS**

This work can be extremely emotionally demanding. Women who choose to work in this field frequently do so because of some previous personal experience. For this reason the work can be even more intensely emotional. Facilitators should spend some time getting to know each other before running groups together. It is important to identify individual styles, strengths, triggers and areas of vulnerability so that facilitators can be aware of how best to complement and support each other.

As previously mentioned, the three vital skills for working with abused women in a group are: experience with group facilitation; experience working with women who have been abused; and a commitment to working from a feminist perspective. Different facilitators may have more or less experience in any of these three areas. It is essential that between them they have experience of all three in depth. The following deals with these areas more specifically.

### **Group Facilitation Skills**

Dealing with issues of domestic violence with a group of women who have experienced such abuse can trigger some members to release strong emotions of fear, anger and frustration. Facilitators, therefore, must be non-judgmental, supportive, and have the ability to help these women deal with their emotions effectively. Rather than lead the group, a facilitator must be able to keep the group focused and on track with the issues that are brought up for discussion by the group members. Specifically, the ability to reflect, summarize, confront and clarify issues within the group is needed.

It is beyond the scope of this guide to cover all the aspects of basic communication and group skill requirements, but any good text will provide you with comprehensive coverage of them. There are some good resources in this area listed in Section Four, the resource section of this manual.

### **Work with Abused Women**

It is essential that facilitators have an in-depth appreciation of the issues facing abused women. Unlike any other group, the facilitator needs an acute awareness of the degree of danger involved in its running. Women who have worked in the area are more likely to understand the precautions necessary to maintain safety. Also, it is vital that facilitators understand the realities that women face in their ongoing dealings with the police, courts and social welfare systems. This is a fundamental necessity in working with this unique group, not only in terms of understanding their experiences but also so that support can be realistic. Without experience, it is difficult to comprehend the ongoing systemic abuse women are exposed to by the systems which are supposedly there to help them.

## **Content Areas for Individual Sessions**

The weekly topics will be aimed at helping mothers understand and start resolving some of their own issues as well as begin to understand the experiences of their children. The intent is to look at the effect of living with violence on both mother and child and on the interactions between them. Material about growth and development will be integrated throughout to help women gain a clearer idea of what they can reasonably expect from their children.

Once this background information has been addressed, the focus will shift to healthy coping mechanisms and to ways women can continue the process of taking charge of their lives. Part of this focus will mean introducing women to resources that may be available to them through the court, health-care and school systems, and through private and/or informal resources as well.

The other major area of focus will be on various issues related to parenting and on parenting approaches and techniques which women might employ. Again the focus will be on group discussion and on using the expertise within the group to help individual women get support in the areas they identify as being of special significance to them.

## **BELIEFS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **Programme Beliefs**

This programme is based on the belief that everyone has the right to live a violence-free life and that it is the right of members of a society to receive help to achieve that state.

Women face major obstacles when attempting to leave abusive relationships. When violence is allowed to continue in a relationship it is detrimental to us all. As well, children who grow up with violence learn that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. This too is detrimental to us all.

Children who have witnessed violence have as many issues to resolve as their mothers – the recipients of the violence. They are, therefore, difficult children to parent, which would be true even if the mothers were not in a state of crisis themselves.

It is the purpose of this programme to support mothers, and through them their children, in their move toward a life free from violence and threat.

### **Programme Objectives:**

1. To decrease the amount of stress experienced by women related to parenting.
2. To increase children's coping skills.



## **SUGGESTED TEN-WEEK SESSION OUTLINE**

Actual Sessions and the order in which they are addressed (with the exception of the Introductory and Final sessions), are chosen by each group of women according to their own needs.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Overview of the ten weeks  
Group process sharing, why are we here?  
How best to use the group

### **2. EFFECTS OF LIVING WITH VIOLENCE**

Power and Control: What was going on  
Mother: How it felt and how you coped  
Children: What did they experience, how did they cope?  
The Cycle of Violence

### **3. REALITIES OF DAY-TO-DAY SURVIVAL**

Being a single parent, how do you handle it?  
Relationship breakup, effects on mother and children  
Mother: Emotional responses to stress  
Children: Living without Daddy

### **4. CONTACT WITH YOUR CHILDREN'S FATHER**

How is it working?  
What are the problems?  
Conflicting feelings/values, Mother and Father  
What is it like for the children?

### **5. LIVING NON-VIOLENTLY, HANDLING ANGER**

Types of abuse, emotional, physical and sexual  
What makes you angry?  
What makes your children angry? Why?  
Healthy/unhealthy ways to handle anger

### **6. ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Aggressive, assertive, non-assertive communication, what's the difference?  
Taking control of your life  
Empowerment, what does it mean?  
Yourself and your children

### **7. PARENTING APPROACHES**

Parenting styles, what's yours?  
How were you parented?  
What messages did you get?  
How did it feel?  
What to keep – what to throw out  
Talking to your children, how to talk and how to listen

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: INTRODUCTION**

**7:00** Introduction of group leaders and overview of the group:

- Brief discussion of own background
- Similarities and strengths in group
- Beliefs and objectives of the programme
- Programme approach
- Read Guidelines

Opening Round; ask women to:

- Introduce self
- Give brief introduction of their children: names and ages
- Say why they joined the group
- Select topics they would like to address over the next 10 weeks

**7:30** Exercise 1: The Introduction

**8:00** Break

**8:15** Exercise 2: How Far Have We Come?

**8:40** Give out the journals, explain their uses. Ask them to write about what comes up in an average week related to children, ex-partners, legal and financial issues, and most important, feelings.

**8:50** Closing Round.

## **EXERCISE 1**

### **THE INTRODUCTION**

**Purpose:** To recognize personal strengths by self-evaluation using group feedback.

**Materials:** Pens, pencils, crayons or markers, a copy of the "Allow Me to Introduce Myself" word balloon handout.

**Description:** Participants are asked to discuss how they would describe themselves to someone they have just met for the first time.

Materials are handed out and participants are asked to fill in their word balloons with the most important aspect of themselves that they would like to share with a person they have just met.

**Group discussion:** Participants formally introduce themselves to the group by sharing their illustration.

The rest of the group is encouraged to ask questions of the person introducing herself and if appropriate, add to her description.

Groups in the beginning stages or any groups whose members are not well acquainted will benefit from this exercise.

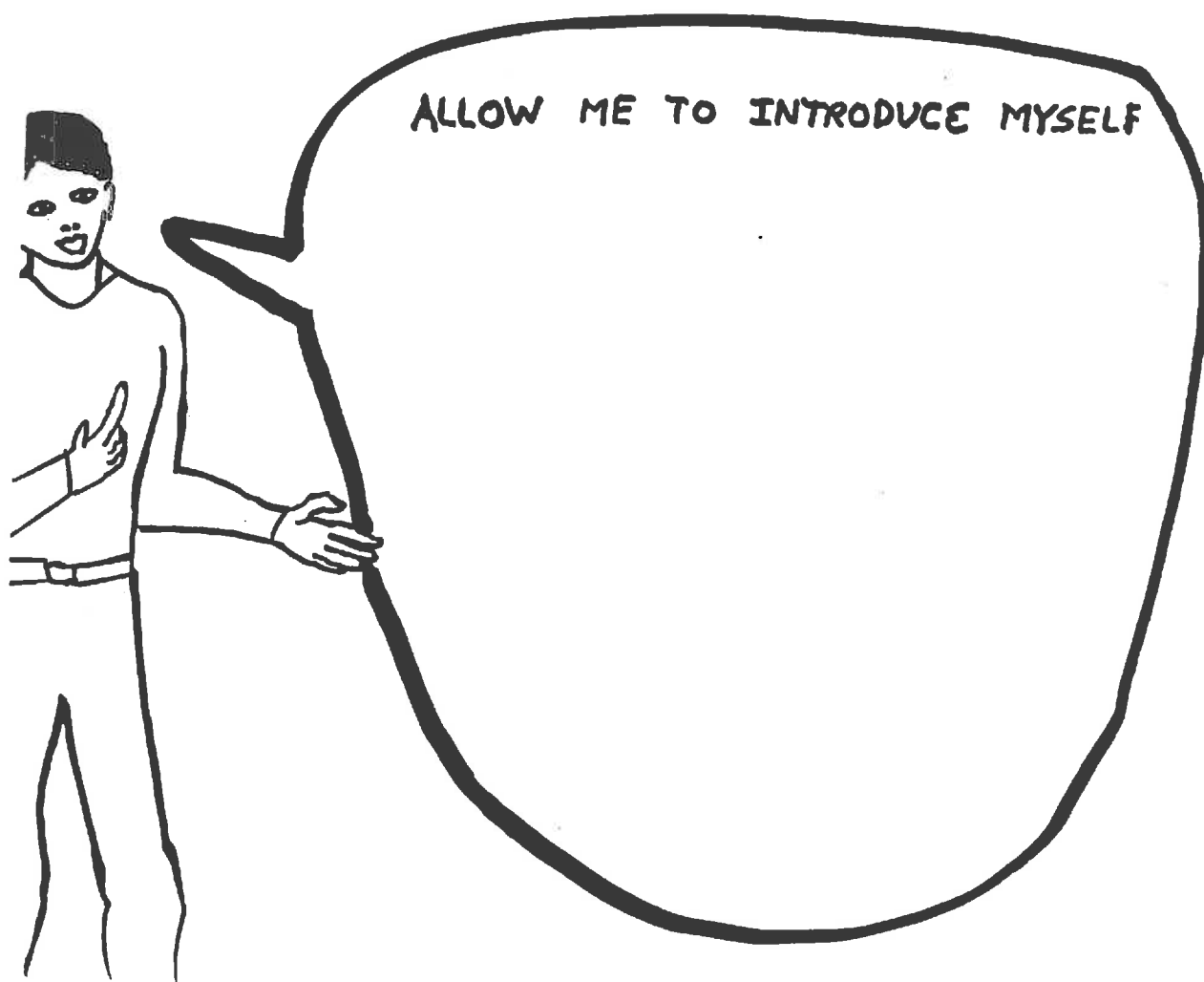
## **EXERCISE 2**

### **HOW FAR HAVE WE COME?**

Each woman is invited to give herself credit for what she has already achieved in getting herself and her children away from the violence.

Use this time to reinforce strengths and help recognize personal worth and value. Also, you may discover misconceptions the women have about relationships with ex-partners, children or the system.

This discussion is designed to give the women a chance to stand back and acknowledge their strengths.



**SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE:  
A VIDEO ABOUT CHILDREN WHO WITNESS VIOLENCE**

- 7:00      Read Guidelines/Opening Round
- 7:15      Exercise 1: View the video, "Seen But Not Heard"
- 7:45      Break
- 8:00      With regard to the video, discuss:
- Anything in the video that particularly struck the women
  - Anything in the video that their children experience
  - Anything that isn't in the video that their children either do or talk about or that they think is significant
- 8:30      Exercise 2: Balloon Exercises
- Watching the video can be an emotionally draining experience. These exercises are designed to end the session on a high note. Pick whichever one is most appropriate.
- 8:50      Closing Round

## **EXERCISE 1**

### **VIEWING OF THE VIDEO ABOUT CHILDREN WHO WITNESS VIOLENCE**

With regard to the video shown, discuss:

- Anything in the video that particularly struck the women.
- Anything in the video which their children experience
- Anything that isn't in the video which their children either do or talk about, or that they think is significant

**Video Viewing:** The video "Seen But Not Heard," is very powerful and the group members may find it extremely upsetting and or/validating. They might express their emotions at the time of viewing, or later when they have had time to think about the content, so either way it is a good idea to set aside plenty of time after the video or at the beginning of the next session to allow for discussion of the content.

It is more beneficial for group members to view the video at the beginning of a session, thus leaving time to wrap up the session with an activity that has a lighter, more positive content.

## **EXERCISE 2**

### **BALLOON EXERCISE: JUGGLING EMOTIONS**

Facilitators ask women to call out how a woman feels who has been in an abusive relationship. Their replies such as fearful, depressed, etc., are then written on balloons and thrown out to the members to keep afloat.

Women juggle balloons until they are tired (10 mins), then let balloons fall to the ground.

Talk to the women about all the hard work it takes to juggle all those emotions, feelings, etc. – how, without the support of others, the greater difficulty they face.

- Ask what they want to do with the balloons.
- Encourage members to stomp on them if desired.
- Check to see if anyone is bothered by sound of balloons popping so that they may leave the room first.

Check in with the women to make sure they are okay to go home; give numbers to call for support.

## **EXERCISE 2**

### **FAMILY OF ORIGIN: "RESPONSES TO ANGER"**

1. When you were a child and you disappointed your parents, how did they respond?
2. When you were a child and you argued with your parents, how did they respond?
3. When you were a child and you went against the advice of your parents, how did they respond?
4. When you were a child and you didn't live up to the expectations of your parents, how did they respond?
5. When your parents criticized you, how did you feel?
6. When your parents tried to control you, how did you feel?
7. When your parents told you what you should think/feel, how did you feel?
8. When your parents made demands on you, how did you feel?
9. When your parents tried to live their lives through you, how did you feel?
10. When your parents told you what they expected of you, how did you feel?
11. When your parents hurt you in any way, how did you feel?

#### **Facilitators:**

- Have each woman answer the questions on paper then share responses.
- Note any similarities or differences.
- Discuss emotional or cognitive responses to doing the exercise.

## **EXERCISE 3**

### **MAKING ANGER WORK FOR YOU**

#### **IDENTIFY YOUR SPECIFIC ANGER PATTERN**

Ask yourself:

1. What are the anger myths that have influenced my misunderstanding of this important emotion?
2. What is my current anger style?
3. What kinds of situations are most likely to bring about my anger?
4. When am I most likely to experience anger?
5. How do I know when I'm angry?
6. What have I tried in the past that hasn't worked?
7. What will be the consequences of not working on my anger?

#### **Facilitators:**

- Review the seven steps.
- Discuss each in the light of the reality of living with or having contact with an abusive partner.
- Discuss how the need for personal safety influences the expression of anger.

## **HANDOUT**

### **MYTHS ABOUT ANGER/FACTS ABOUT ANGER**

#### **Myths About Anger**

ANSWER "A" FOR AGREE OR "D" FOR DISAGREE

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. If a person doesn't look or sound angry, he doesn't have a problem with anger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Anger always leads to some form of violence and therefore it is never good to be angry.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The best way to deal with anger is to stifle it. Expressing anger breeds even more anger and leads to loss of control.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. If you express anger to someone you love, it will destroy the relationship. Anger and love don't mix.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The best way to deal with anger is to ignore it. If you ignore it, it will go away.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The best way to deal with anger is to dump it. Just get all of that anger out of your system.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Nice people don't get angry.

#### **Facts About Anger**

- 1. Just because you don't look or feel angry does not mean you don't have a problem with anger.
- 2. Anger can be expressed in ways other than through violence.
- 3. If I am aware of my anger and choose to express it to someone I love in healthy ways, the anger can be used to help strengthen and enrich our relationship.
- 4. Anger is one of the most powerful of all the emotions, and ignoring your experiences of anger is usually hazardous to your emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual health.
- 5. We can choose healthy ways to express our anger.
- 6. When you are angry and when you are in doubt about what you want to do with it, stop and think.
- 7. Everyone experiences anger.

### **RESPONDING TO ANGER ASSERTIVELY**

- 1. Ask yourself: What's my motive?
- 2. Acknowledge the feelings of the other person.
- 3. Use "I" messages not "You" messages.
- 4. Stay in the present.
- 5. Keep it brief and to the point.
- 6. Be honest about what you're feeling.
- 7. Restore good feelings.



## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: ASSERTIVENESS**

- 7:00 Read Guidelines/Opening Round
- 7:15 Exercise 1: Strength and Weakness Inventory
- 7:30 Discussion
- 8:00 Break
- 8:15 Exercise 2: How Do You Give Criticism to Others  
Without Hurting Their Feelings?
- 8:25 Exercise 3: Assertiveness Practice Situations
- 8:50 Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS INVENTORY**

List 10 strengths – positive beliefs about your abilities, intelligence, achievements:

1. I am \_\_\_\_\_
2. I am \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am \_\_\_\_\_
4. I am \_\_\_\_\_
5. I am \_\_\_\_\_
6. I am \_\_\_\_\_
7. I am \_\_\_\_\_
8. I am \_\_\_\_\_
9. I am \_\_\_\_\_
10. I am \_\_\_\_\_

## EXERCISE 3

### ASSERTIVENESS PRACTICE SITUATIONS

Many people do not understand the meaning of ASSERTIVENESS. They confuse "assertiveness" with "aggression" and see it as a forceful type of behaviour suitable only for boys and men. Assertiveness simply means standing up for one's rights and expressing feelings directly and honestly in a way that does not violate the rights of someone else.

If you are not assertive, and put a lot of energy into being nice, avoiding conflicts and trying not to hurt other people's feelings, not only are you being unfair and dishonest to yourself and to others, but you may also be setting yourself up to be taken advantage of or abused.

Most young women are taught to follow the wishes of others, often against their own best interests. It is important, therefore, to learn and practice assertiveness. There are a number of books available on assertiveness and training courses where you can learn and practice assertiveness with others. The following practice situations may be helpful in trying out your newly acquired assertiveness skills.

#### Practice Situations:

1. Your best friend wants to borrow a new sweater that you have not yet had a chance to wear yourself. She promises to take good care of it and return it tomorrow. You would rather she did not borrow the sweater because she can be careless sometimes and it is a brand new sweater. You don't want to hurt her feelings. *How would you respond?*
2. You are riding home on the bus. A man sits beside you and tries to make a pass. He starts asking you questions: Where are you going? Where do you live? Can I have your telephone number? Would you like to go out sometime? *How would you respond?*
3. Your son (9 years old) did not come home from school and has not called to tell you where he is. You have told the children several times that they are to come directly home after school before going out to a friends. At 6:30 your son phones to say that he is going to stay for dinner at a friends. You have already made his dinner. *How would you respond?*

#### Facilitators:

- Read the material written at the beginning of the practice situations.
- Assign each practice situation to a different group member.
- Have each of these members read the situation out loud to the group.
- The group will try to identify assertive responses to the situations.

## **HANDOUT**

### **YOUR EVERYDAY ASSERTIVE RIGHTS**

No one can manipulate your emotions or behaviour if you do not allow it to happen – our assertive rights are a basic framework for each individual's healthy participation in any human relationship.

- You have the right to be treated with respect.
- You have the right to be listened to and taken seriously.
- You have the right to set your own priorities.
- You have the right to judge your own thoughts and emotions and take responsibility for them.
- The assertive person accepts the consequences of her/his own behaviour and does not waste time and energy blaming others for it.
- You have the right to offer no excuses or reasons for justifying your behaviour.
- You have the right to judge if you are responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems. (A problem is a personal possession and the responsibility of the owner.)
- You have the right to change your mind.
- You have the right to make mistakes and be responsible for them.
- You have the right to say, "I don't know."
- You have the right to refuse favours.
- You have the right to be illogical.
- You have the right to say, "I don't understand."
- You have the right to say, "I don't care."
- You have the right to say "NO", without feeling guilty.
- You have the right to have feelings and to express these feelings in ways that do not violate the rights of others. (E.g., the right to feel tired, happy, depressed, sexy, or lonely.)

## **HANDOUT**

### **NON-ASSERTIVE, AGGRESSIVE, AND ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR**

#### **Non-Assertive Behaviour**

Non-Assertive behaviour consists of being passive in your relationships. You deny yourself and hold back from expressing your actual feelings. You often feel hurt and anxious. You allow other people to choose for you and rarely end up reaching your desired goal. People use you or feel sympathy or contempt for you.

#### **Aggressive Behaviour**

Aggressive behaviour is carrying your own desires for self-assertion to the extreme. You accomplish your own ends at the expense of other people, not respecting their rights; making choices for them and putting down the other person.

#### **Assertive Behaviour**

Assertive behaviour is acting according to your rights as a human being while respecting the rights of others. Behaviour that allows you to act in your best interests, to stand up for yourself without being unduly anxious, to express your honest feelings comfortably and to exercise your own rights without denying the rights of others is assertive behaviour.

You have the right to be and to express yourself without feeling guilty about doing so as long as you respect the rights of other people in the process.

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: LIVING WITH, AND LEAVING ABUSE**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round.
7:15	Exercise 1: What Was It Like to Live with Abuse? Exercise 2: Life Away from the Abusive Relationship
8:00	Break
8:15	Exercise 2: Life away from the abusive relationship (continued)
8:30	Exercise 3: Where do I want to be five years from now?
8:50	Closing Round

**Note:** This session is a logical one to precede the one on "Ongoing Contact with Children's Father." Women can be asked to think about the implications of this session when thinking about the next one.

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO LIVE WITH ABUSE? (Use flipchart)**

- Brainstorm a list of positive and negative effects on mother.
- Brainstorm a list of positive and negative effects on children.
- Discuss: What made you leave?  
How difficult was it to leave: for your children/for you?  
What was the hardest/easiest thing about leaving?

## **EXERCISE 2**

### **LIFE AWAY FROM THE ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP (Use flipchart)**

- Brainstorm the positive and negative effects of having left the abusive relationship for both the mothers and the children.
- Identify the most difficult results of having left (e.g., ongoing harassment through the courts).
- Try to identify strategies to address these concerns.
- Generate a list of resources and supports women have used since leaving.

## **EXERCISE 3**

### **WHERE DO I WANT TO BE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?**

This exercise is designed to encourage women to identify realistic goals and to develop a short and long term plan. Five years is seen as being enough time for most of them to have their children in school at least part time.

- Have them list a 1-year, a 3-year, and a 5-year goal.
- Next have them think of quick and easy steps they can take toward meeting each of the goals.
- Have them work in pairs and help each other problem solve.
- Next, begin work on slightly longer term strategies.
- Bring the group back together to share plans. This exercise can be discontinued and picked up again next week. Women can work on their plans during the intervening week.

This exercise can be modified to meet the needs of individuals or groups depending on their predominant needs.

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: ONGOING CONTACT WITH CHILDREN'S FATHER**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round
7:15	Exercise 1: Issues Related to Ongoing Contact with Children's Father
7:40	Share answers
8:00	Break
8:15	Summarize shared answers
8:50	Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **ISSUES RELATED TO ONGOING CONTACT WITH CHILDREN'S FATHER**

Give each woman a piece of paper and a pencil and have her answer the following questions:

- What are the most upsetting aspects of this contact?
- What are your ex-partner's most annoying/worrying/intrusive/manipulative behaviours?
- What *behaviours* does contact with their father produce in your children?
- What *feelings* does this contact produce in you? In your children?

#### **SHARE ANSWERS.**

Summarize the shared answers to the questions and try to identify three or four of the most common/serious concerns:

- Use the flip chart and brainstorm solutions to these. This might involve hearing about things that one woman has tried which worked or perhaps identifying what would be the ideal resolution to this problem, what is the best you can hope for and what might decrease the gap between the two?
- Have each woman identify one strategy that she thinks addresses her most troublesome concern. For example, it might be that she doesn't want to be so triggered by her children's acting out after being with/talking to their father.
- How might she handle that?

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: PARENTING STYLES**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round
7:15	Exercise 1: What Beliefs Do You Have about Your Parenting?
8:00	Break
8:15	Exercise 2: What Skills are Important/Not Important for Parenting? Exercise 3: The Duluth "Love and Care for Your Children Wheel"
8:50	Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **WHAT BELIEFS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT YOUR PARENTING?**

- Use a flipchart to brainstorm examples of parenting behaviours, "good" and "bad."
- Assess the parents' beliefs on "good" and "bad" parents by asking:
  - Where did these beliefs come from?
  - How are they affecting your kids?
  - How can we stop the transfer of negative beliefs to our kids?

### **EXERCISE 2**

#### **WHAT SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT/NOT IMPORTANT FOR PARENTING?**

Have parents brainstorm a list on the flipchart. Discuss the list. Justify answers

### **EXERCISE 3**

#### **THE DULUTH "LOVE AND CARE FOR YOUR CHILDREN WHEEL"**

Refer to the Duluth "Love and Care for Your Children Wheel" (see Handout). Discuss the lists produced in Exercise 2 in relation to the wheel.





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## **HANDOUT**

### **PRINCIPLES OF NATURAL AND LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES**

1. Reward and punishment deny children the opportunity to make their own decisions and to be responsible for their own behaviour.
2. Natural and logical consequences require children to be responsible for their own behaviour.
3. Natural consequences are those which permit children to learn from the natural order of the physical world – for example, that not eating is followed by hunger.
4. Logical consequences are those which permit children to learn from the reality of the social order – for example, children who do not get up on time may be late for school and have to make up work.
5. For consequences to be effective the children involved must see them as logical.
6. The purpose of using natural and logical consequences is to motivate children to make responsible decisions, not to force their submission. Consequences are effective only if you avoid having hidden motives of winning and controlling.
7. Be both firm and kind. Firmness refers to your follow-through behaviour. Kindness refers to the manner in which you present the choice.
8. Talk less, act more.
9. When you do things for children that they can do for themselves you are robbing them of self-respect and responsibility.
10. Differences between punishment and logical consequences:
  - Punishment expresses the power of personal authority. Logical consequences express the impersonal reality of the social order.
  - Punishment is rarely related to misbehaviour. Logical consequences are logically related to misbehaviour.
  - Punishment tells the child he or she is bad. Logical consequences imply no element of moral judgment.
  - Punishment focuses on what is past. Logical consequences are concerned with present and future behaviour.
  - Punishment is associated with a threat, either open or concealed. Logical consequences are based on good will, not on retaliation.
  - Punishment demands obedience. Logical consequences permit choice.
11. Avoid fights; they indicate lack of respect for the other person. Do not give in; that indicates lack of respect for yourself.
12. Steps in applying logical consequences:
  - Provide choices and accept the child's decision. Use a friendly tone of voice that communicates your good will.
  - As you follow through with a consequence, assure children that they may try again later.
  - If the misbehaviour is repeated, extend the time that must elapse before the child tries again.
13. Be patient, it will take time for natural and logical consequences to be effective.

## **HANDOUT**

### **UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD AND YOURSELF**

1. Emotions serve a purpose. Our emotions always support our real intentions.
2. Our feelings don't "just happen," we bring them about.
3. Our feelings are influenced by our beliefs.
4. "Sensitive" children try to force us to treat them as special.
5. Emotions can be used to control and retaliate against others, or to protect and excuse ourselves from functioning.
6. You are responsible for your own feelings and behaviour.
7. A feeling of competition between brothers and sisters discourages certain traits and stimulates the development of others.
8. The child's position in the family constellation influences but does not determine personality and behaviour. In the final analysis, each individual makes his or her own decisions.
9. Misbehaving children are discouraged children.
10. "Good" parents are so involved with their children that they believe they must do everything for them.
11. Avoid "snoopervising" the child's every move.
12. "Good" parents rob children of self-confidence and independence.
13. When you protect children from the consequences of their behaviour, you are preventing them from learning.
14. Responsible parents give children choices and let them experience the results of their decisions.
15. Be kind; show respect for your child. Be firm; show respect for yourself.
16. Setting high goals and placing a premium on being best will influence your child to give up if she or he cannot be the best.
17. Pity tells a child you believe he or she is incapable.
18. Children display inadequacy in order to be excused or to get special service.
19. It is in the best interests of children to help them become responsible.
20. Controlling, dominating, overprotecting, and pitying all violate respect for the child.

## **HANDOUT**

### **ENCOURAGEMENT: BUILDING YOUR CHILD'S CONFIDENCE AND FEELINGS OF WORTH**

1. Encouragement is the process of focusing on your children's assets and strengths in order to build their self-confidence and feelings of worth.
2. Focus on what is good about the child or the situation. See the positive.
3. Accept your children as they are. Don't make your love and acceptance dependent on their behaviour.
4. Have faith in your children so they can come to believe in themselves.
5. Let your children know their worth. Recognize improvement and effort, not just accomplishment.
6. Respect your children. It will lay the foundation of their self-respect.
7. Praise is reserved for things well done. It implies a spirit of competition. Encouragement is given for effort or improvement. It implies a spirit of cooperation.
8. The most powerful forces in human relationships are expectations. We can influence a person's behaviour by changing our expectations of the person.
9. Lack of faith in children helps them to anticipate failure.
10. Standards that are too high invite failure and discouragement.
11. Avoid subtle encouragement of competition between brothers and sisters.
12. Avoid using discouraging words and actions.
13. Avoid tacking qualifiers to your words of encouragement. Don't "give with one hand and take away with the other."
14. The sounds of encouragement are words that build feelings of adequacy:
  - "I like the way you handled that"
  - "I know you can handle it"
  - "I appreciate what you did"
  - "It looks as if you worked very hard on that"
  - "You're improving"

## **HANDOUT**

### **HOW TO DISCIPLINE WITHOUT SPANKING**

#### **Setting Limits**

The goal of discipline is to teach self-control, but until children are old enough to set limits for themselves, parents must do it for them. When telling a child what she/he can and cannot do, be firm and clear and avoid ambiguity with statements like: "You may make noise, but not too much."

Once you have made a rule, apply it consistently. Behaviour that is unacceptable one day cannot be permissible the next because you are too busy to deal with it at the time.

When you want to stop what a child is doing, action works better than words. Distract her/him with an alternate game or activity that is fun, or move the child to another spot. While you are doing this, briefly say why it is necessary. Act confidently; hesitation and lengthy explanations are a challenge to children and invoke a battle of wills.

#### **How to State Limits**

- Recognize your child's wish by repeating it simply: "I understand that you'd like to watch TV."
- State the limit gently but firmly: "But it's bedtime now."
- Provide an alternative: "I'll read you a story" or "You can watch TV tomorrow."
- If the child is resentful or angry, help her/him to express it: "You wish you could stay up longer" or "You wish you were bigger and there were no bedtime rules."

#### **When Rules are Broken**

If you set limits clearly and confidently, children will usually conform. When they break a rule (and all children do so occasionally), hold your ground and avoid being dragged into arguments or becoming defensive. The strength you convey is reassuring and helps children learn to curb their impulses.

#### **How to Stay Cool and Avoid Anger**

- Rather than resorting to shouting or threatening, use your strength and size to defuse trouble. A child who won't come out of a bath can be lifted. A child who won't walk can be carried. A child who hits can be held and told "NO."
- Avoid joining into tantrums: Turn your back, or walk away. Don't talk until the tantrum ends and then, don't mention it. If you're in public and embarrassed, carry the child to a private spot or the car. Do not give into tantrums unless you want your child to learn that they sometimes work.
- When a child is being silly – teasing, provoking, and refusing to listen, don't waste energy on shouts that could end in a slap. Crouch down, grasp him or her by the upper arms so she/he cannot avoid looking at you, then talk.

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: THE PERFECT MOTHER**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round
7:15	Exercise 1: The Perfect Mother
8: 00	Break
8:15	Discussion
8:50	Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **THE PERFECT MOTHER**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this exercise is to help women identify any myths they might hold about what constitutes a perfect mother and to discover where these beliefs came from. It is also to help the women see that what they are already doing as a mother is part of what they envision a mother should do.

This exercise also helps women discover what is getting in the way of their ability to recognize the good stuff that they are already doing.

This exercise may be done in two parts. Either one can be done first.

One part involves drawing a picture of the perfect mother – what does she look like externally?

1. Give individuals paper and pencils.
2. Produce a picture of the perfect mother.
3. Share, describe, and explain pictures.

For the second part, use a flipchart and brainstorm a series of characteristics inherent in the perfect mother. Also, a list of absolute no-nos can be put beside the desirable characteristics.

#### **Discussion:**

- Where do these values and beliefs come from?
- Are they reasonable?
- Does anyone act this way all the time? Most of the time?
- What effect does the pressure to be this way impose on you?
- Does this picture really add up to a perfect mother?
- What is really important in a "perfect mother"?

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: POWER AND CONTROL**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round
7:15	Exercise 1: Living with Violence: The More Sneaky Ways Men Control Women's Behaviour
7:45	Discussion
8:00	Break
8:15	Exercise 2: Children: What Was Their Experience of the Violence? or Exercise 3: Women's Responses to Control
8:50	Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **LIVING WITH VIOLENCE: THE MORE SNEAKY WAYS MEN CONTROL WOMEN'S BEHAVIOUR**

- On a flipchart, brainstorm all the little ways ex-partners have "controlled" women.
- If desired, refer to the example of what one group of women produced in response to this exercise and compare to your group's responses (see Handout).

#### **Discuss:**

- What effect did the control have on their emotional health?
- How did it feel?
- What effect did being "off-balance" have on their ability to think or plan?
- How did they cope?

## **EXERCISE 2**

### **CHILDREN: WHAT WAS THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE VIOLENCE?**

Ask the women the following questions about their children's experience of violence (each child should be referred to individually):

- How old was your child?
- What did he/she see and hear?
- What was their reaction, how did they cope?
- How did they react – When leaving? – Later on? – Now?

## **EXERCISE 3**

### **WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO CONTROL**

Give each woman a piece of paper:

- Ask her to write one reason why she is glad she left, and one thing she misses.
- Share the responses.
- Ask the women to keep track of all the irritating and harassing things they have to deal with during the week.
- Also ask them to do one nice thing for themselves during the week and tell us about it next time.



## **HANDOUT**

### **EXAMPLE OF A PREVIOUS GROUP'S RESPONSES TO EXERCISE 1: "Living With Violence: The More Sneaky Ways Men Control Women's Behaviour"**

#### **Men's Behaviour Toward Partner**

- Derogatory remarks made toward partner's appearance.
- Controlled conversations, for example, by making partner give specific times and places of past incidences whenever partner brought them up or happened to mention them in conversation, causing deflection from the real issue that the partner wanted solved.
- Denied control of all aspects of partner's life, e.g., isolation from family and friends, no control of money.
- Created animosity between himself and partner's family and friends.
- Tried to change partner.
- Put down partner's ethnic or racial origin.
- Disrespectful toward partner.
- Made physical threats toward partner and carried them out.

#### **Effects of Men's Behaviour on Partner**

- Decreased self-esteem.
- Walked on eggshells trying to avoid abusive behaviour.
- Tried to control children's behaviour so as not to upset the abuser.
- Increased self-doubt, decreased trust, and increased defensiveness
- Contemplation of and/or attempt at suicide.

#### **Effects of Men's Behaviour on the Children**

- Would go scared and quiet when they saw mom upset and abused.
- Became watchful.
- Became submissive.
- Became afraid of anger.
- Became very tuned in to other people's emotions.

#### **Effects on Partner After Leaving the Abuser**

- Increased self-esteem.
- Likes Self.
- Recognizes own strengths.
- Has learned to trust
- Likes living alone and caring for self
- Knows self better
- Weight lifted from shoulders
- Freedom

## **HANDOUT**

### **IF YOUR CHILDREN HAVE WITNESSED ABUSE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO:**

- Reassure them that they are safe and give them the skills to keep themselves safe in the future (i.e., phone 911, don't intervene, go to a safe place).
- Reassure them that they are in no way responsible for the family's problems.
- Reassure them that they are not responsible for their parent's pain or anger.
- Allow them opportunities to express their anger and other feelings and teach them healthy ways of dealing with negative emotions.
- Discourage your child from taking care of you or acting as a surrogate spouse. Give them permission to be a child.
- Help them understand that your family is not the only family to have had this experience, and that other families have handled this situation successfully.
- Maintain regular, consistent routines and discipline.
- Provide them with healthy adult role models (i.e., how to handle conflict, how to be assertive etc.).

## **HANDOUT**

### **CHILDREN WHO WITNESS ABUSE, AND THEIR SELF-ESTEEM**

All children need help in developing and maintaining self-esteem. Children who have witnessed abuse may need extra support. Children who have seen or heard violence in the home often have low self-esteem because:

- Witnessing violence is as traumatizing as experiencing violence.
- They don't feel safe.
- They feel they are to blame.
- Their needs may be continually overlooked or suppressed in order to keep the violent partner appeased.

#### **They are Traumatized**

Witnessing violence is as damaging as being abused. The child learns to accept violent behaviour as a normal part of family life.

#### **They Don't Feel Safe**

If there is violence in the home, children may not feel safe or secure because they are not sure when the next violent outburst will occur. They may also be confused by the inconsistencies of the violent behaviour (i.e., the violent partner may be loving and gentle as well as abusive). The message they learn is that they cannot trust their environment.

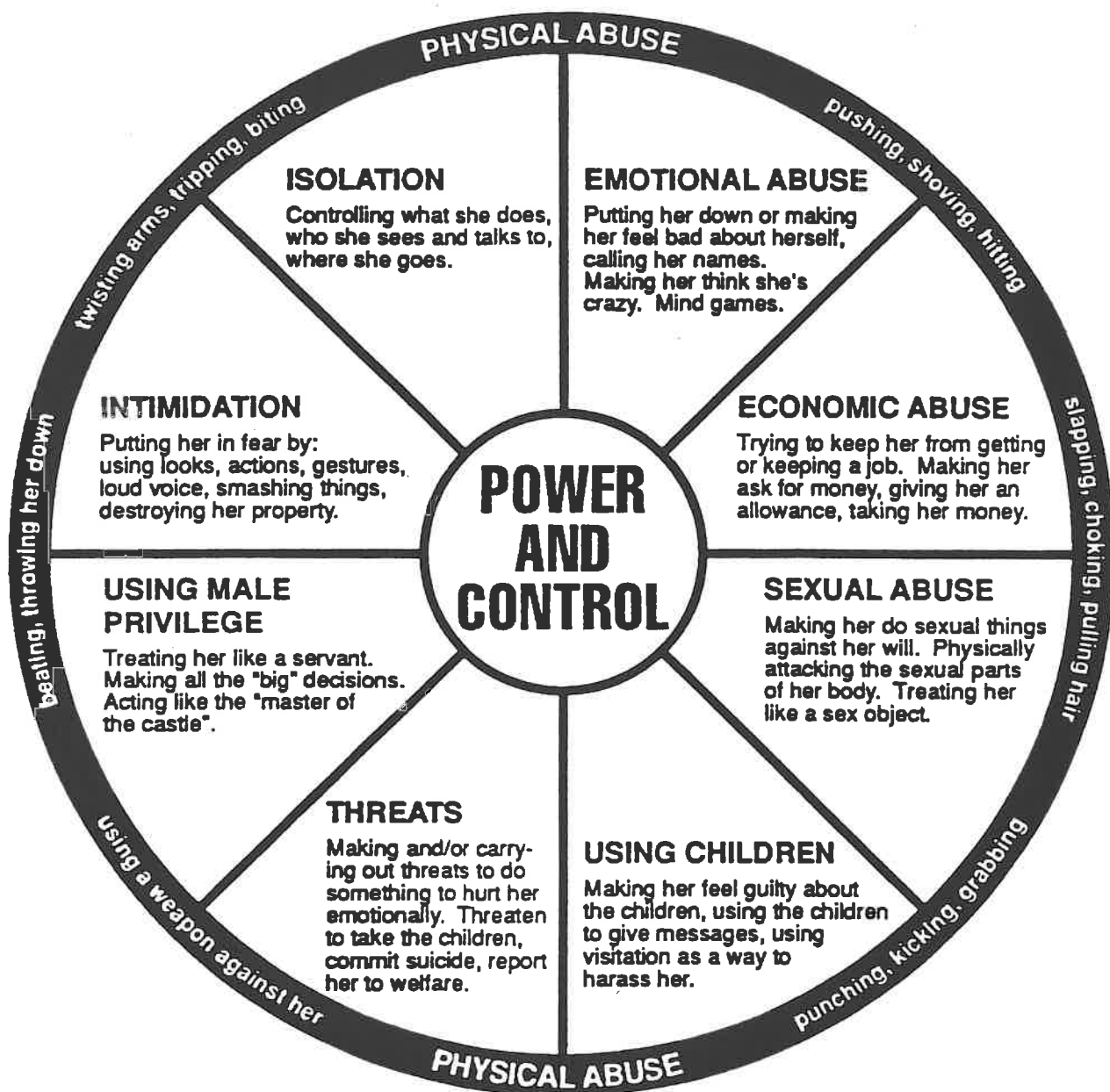
#### **They Feel They are to Blame**

Children may feel they are to blame for the violence, they are not protecting their mothers from the violence, and they are the cause of the marriage break-up. They may believe that if they had behaved differently then the abusive incident would not have occurred. The message they learn is that they are bad and incompetent.

#### **Their Needs May be Overlooked**

Children may not get the attention and care they need because in order to appease the abuser, his needs always come first. Therefore, the child learns they are not important or special and don't deserve to get their needs met.

## Power and Control Wheel



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## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: SELF-ESTEEM**

7:00	Read Guidelines/Opening Round
7:15	Exercise 1: What is Self-Esteem?
8:00	Break
8:15	Exercise 2: Mirror Mirror on the Wall or Exercise 3: Questions about Self-esteem or Exercise 4: Hats We Wear or Exercise 5: Identifying Our Strengths
8:50	Closing Round

### **EXERCISE 1**

#### **WHAT IS SELF-ESTEEM?**

##### **Facilitators:**

- Have one group member read aloud the article "Self-Awareness/Self-Esteem," and another member read, "What Does a Woman with Healthy Self-Esteem Look Like?"
- Ask the women what they think about what they just heard.

Solicit from group members their own personal stories that relate to what was just read to them.

## **HANDOUT**

### **SELF-AWARENESS/SELF-ESTEEM**

Low self-esteem is one of the most pervasive effects of the society we live in and its structure. Western culture values money. It undervalues mothering and labour in the home. Women can be heard saying "I'm just a housewife." Her work is not valued or appreciated and no power is attached to it.

Many women report a lack of self-confidence and low self-esteem, as a block to change. Regardless of what we do, there remains a persistent feeling of self-doubt, which makes it difficult to risk a move in a new direction or try out a new behaviour. There are many degrees of this lack of confidence, keeping women from acting as fully as we might.

Self-image is learned and can be changed. Through starting to trust and accept each other, through talking about ourselves and getting feedback, we can begin to make a change in our self-image. Before we can make significant changes in our lives, we must first begin to value, and like ourselves.

Many women feel as if they have lost their identities, others may feel that they have never had a chance to find themselves as individuals because of the constant pressure to take care of their family's needs and desires. Our own needs have often slipped to the end of a long string where they are seldom considered – there has often been no time to consider who we are. It is important to get in touch with ourselves and to consider our own unique needs.

Our sense of self-esteem is directly and intimately related to our ability to experience achievements, successes, and satisfactions in our lives. This varies from person to person. No one definition applies to all of us. What is important is that we define where and what these experiences are in our lives, and begin to expand our definitions so that they are more inclusive, i.e., they come from everywhere – nature, sports, family, hand-skills, reading, sex and food.

As women, we are not accustomed to recognizing and naming our own strengths, successes and achievements. Each of us has many. Whether we can admit them, or even recognize them is another story. Sometimes we wait for others to tell us our strengths or successes before we can acknowledge them. At other times we may look at what a group, or society, or parent defines as success and achievement and measure ourselves against this external standard.

When we rely mainly upon others for this input and validation of ourselves as people, we will probably have difficulty feeling our strengths – usually external feedback does not occur in sufficient quantity to allow us to feel positive about ourselves.

Our cultural bias often affects how we acknowledge our strengths. We have a great fear of being judged boastful or conceited. In general, we feel more comfortable talking about our failures rather than our successes. Self-improvement is often wrongly defined as overcoming our weaknesses and failures rather than as looking at how we can develop new strengths and build upon the successes and strengths we already have.

Positive self-esteem, liking ourselves, and feeling self-confident, is built on learning and admitting what we can do and have done, not what we have been unable to do.

Self-esteem is established and increased through recognition of our strengths, positive messages we give ourselves, and positive feedback we get from others. We tend to give ourselves negative messages and come to believe they are true.

### **WHAT DOES A WOMAN WITH HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM LOOK LIKE?**

An adult woman with healthy self-esteem does not consider herself the centre of the universe, but she does focus on the positive. While she is not vain, arrogant or narcissistic, she does enjoy a reasonable degree of self-assurance. Like all human beings, we sometimes experience self-doubt and may, on occasion, become discouraged or disappointed, but such feelings are not incapacitating and they generally do not last long.

When a woman with high self-esteem fails at a task, she can comfort herself with memories of past successes and vow to do better next time. If she feels disliked by one person, she can assure herself that there are many who like her. She reminds herself that she can't please everyone. The woman with high self-esteem has a variety of quality human relationships with people of many ages. She has a diversity of skills and interests. She has a realistic idea of her own strengths and weaknesses. When she becomes upset or depressed, she has a variety of ways of restoring her emotional equilibrium.

The woman with high self-esteem has a sense of her innate worth. She feels comfortable and content with who she is. She is not overly self-critical. She can be open and direct with her anger when she feels it is appropriate, but she does not use anger to intimidate or control others. She is free to love and be loved. She learns and grows with a sense of pleasure, not pain. She does not believe that there is anything fundamentally wrong with her. She likes herself.

### **A Woman with Low Self-Esteem**

This woman sees herself as a helpless victim of fate. Her life is something beyond her control. She frequently finds herself unable to act in her own interest. If she fails to achieve a goal, she may quite unjustifiably feel that others are critical

and rejecting. Her basic sense of self-worth and her confidence in her own abilities are shaky. A loss, a slight, or some other blow to her self-esteem may throw her into a state of prolonged despair and depression.

Women with low self-esteem often have trouble modulating their anger and using it effectively. They find themselves unable to become angry, even in situations where anger would be quite appropriate. Or if they do become angry it is in hostile, destructive, or indirect ways that may only make things worse.

The woman with low self-esteem frequently turns to others for emotional support and reassurance because she feels she lacks inner resources. She may repeatedly demonstrate poor judgement in her selection of friends and partners because she is often acting out of extreme neediness rather than mature interest and care. She almost expects, and certainly tolerates troubled and dysfunctional relationships. Since she tends to depend on the support others provide to maintain her psychological equilibrium, people may perceive her as manipulative and overly dependent. As a result many of the friendships she forms tend to be fragile and fraught with turmoil and difficulties.

There may be only a very few people on whom she feels she can rely. It often happens that there is only a single, highly important person on whom she feels she can depend. For heterosexual women, this is usually a male partner – a partner who expects to receive, but not necessarily give emotional support. Nevertheless, a woman with low self-esteem will experience the disruption of such a highly important relationship as the loss of her most vital supply of psychological support, furthermore, she will have to bear the grief of this loss with few alternative emotional resources.

In a family or a society where a female's experience is frequently one of being devalued, unappreciated, or abused, low self-esteem is an inevitable consequence. Women who through no fault of their own have not received adequate nurturing and care frequently grow up to feel that they do not really deserve to be happy or successful. They often describe feeling inadequate or worthless, and they spend more time worrying about their deficiencies than appreciating their good qualities. They typically dislike their bodies for being less than physically perfect as defined by some arbitrary and changing cultural standard. When things go wrong, they blame themselves, and they tend to be extremely harsh in their self-criticisms.

It is no surprise that women with low self-esteem are extremely vulnerable to depression and that their periods of depression may linger for weeks, months, or even years. Unless a woman with low self-esteem is able to take steps to improve her feelings about herself, she will have little chance of living to her full potential and experiencing happiness.



## EXERCISE 2

### MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL

Before you read this page, have a good, long look at yourself in the nearest mirror. (I'll bet you never realized how special you really are!)

Here is a checklist for you:

Hair Colour: \_\_\_\_\_

Eye Colour: \_\_\_\_\_

Height: \_\_\_\_\_

Anything else you notice?

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Who do people say you look like?

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What do you think?

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There's a lot more to you than what you see looking back at you in the mirror. Your personality – all the qualities that make up you – is most important. This includes things like:

What do your friends like best about you?

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What do you like best about you? (Don't be afraid to brag a little!)

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Are there things about yourself you'd like to change? What are they. Why do you want to change them? Who could help you?

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#### Facilitators:

- Ask each woman to share her exercise.
- If anyone has difficulty coming up with things they like about themselves, get group members to help them.

### EXERCISE 3

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT SELF-ESTEEM

Have each woman take a piece of paper and answer the following questions (facilitators answer too):

- "How do you act when you are feeling positive and strong?"
- "What situation(s) trigger those feelings?" Give examples.
- "How do you act when you are feeling negative and weak?"
- "What situation(s) trigger those feelings?" Give examples.
- "Where does self-esteem come from?"
- How do you develop positive or negative self-esteem?
- Why can you feel strong in some situations and not in others?
- Can you remember things your parents said to you that you swore you'd never say to your kids?

Share responses. Note similarities, common feelings, and actions. How do they relate to the amount of self-esteem being experienced during the described situation?

### EXERCISE 4

#### HATS WE WEAR

**Purpose:** To increase awareness of the roles we play in this society and to increase critical awareness of the value of women's work and the function of its being devalued in this society.

Facilitator draws a little girl and asks the group to identify her hats. (Her head is her SELF, her hats are her roles – e.g., daughter, sister.)

Talk briefly about the expectations linked to each hat.

Then move quickly to draw an adult woman and her hats – the main focus of the exercise.

The group add all the hats they wear to this one drawing (mother, chauffeur, etc.).

After all the hats are on, the group picks a **few** to discuss.

- What are the expectations connected to the hat?
- What are our positive and negative feelings about wearing it?  
(Wife and mother are two that lead to much discussion.)

The facilitator then asks what the group saw and felt in doing this exercise.

- Are these hats recognized and valued in this society?
- Are they necessary – do they play a necessary part in this society?
- Why are they not validated, valued?
- Should they be?
- What are alternatives, i.e., ways of easing, valuing women's load of hats.

The facilitator asks the group to summarize what they learned.

## **EXERCISE 5**

### **IDENTIFYING OUR STRENGTHS**

The group brainstorms and flipcharts strengths we have as women, strengths we would like to improve on, strengths we see in other women.

These are just a few – the list could be endless.

Ask each woman to quickly and intuitively write down 5 or more strengths she identifies in herself, and 5 more strengths she would like to have.

Encourage trust in our intuition, what comes to our head first.

Ask the group to break into smaller groups (3-4) and share their lists.

In the total group, direct the discussion along following lines:

- How did it feel saying good things about yourself?
- Was it easier or more difficult to talk about yourself or to listen attentively to someone else – or neither?
- What can you remember about your non-verbal communication? How were you sitting?
- What kind of eye contact was going on, etc.?

Use the exercise to draw attention to our behaviour (verbal, non-verbal), and our feelings.

\*A variation: Write down five of your most positive strengths in big letters, pin it on and wear it for the rest of the meeting.

## **HANDOUT**

### **WAYS TO HEIGHTEN SELF-ESTEEM**

- Discover, clarify and build on your strengths.
- Resist feelings of guilt – we are not obligated to continually live up to the expectations of others.
- Broaden your vision and avoid over-personalizing problems: In this way more effective strategies for change can be found.
- Know yourself and your values, be firm in your belief system and you will be less dependent on others for approval.
- Balance nurturance of self and others.
- Increase the dimension of celebration in your life: Creative energy will arise.
- Try to develop many sources of satisfaction (in your relationships, activities, etc.), for “when one well is dry, another may flow.”
- Develop your own senses of purpose, direction and personal goals, in this way new meaning can be found in even the simplest aspects of your daily life.
- Give yourself permission to make mistakes and learn from them.
- Cultivate people in your life who care about you and like you for the person you are.

## **HANDOUT**

### **SELF-ESTEEM**

Self-esteem is defined as "a sense of one's worth." It involves the set of opinions or beliefs that we have about ourselves, such as: our background, our personal characteristics, our abilities, and our values and philosophies. For every person these are different. This overall concept of ourselves affects how we remember the past, how we interpret the present, and predict the future. Probably the most powerful determinant of our feelings about ourselves is the evaluation of others. When we want others to like us, we shape and mold our behaviours to gain their approval. Good characteristics may be squelched and undermined in the process.

In childhood, we are taught by authorities, such as parents and teachers, which characteristics are acceptable, and which are not. Women are taught to be compassionate, understanding, warm, nurturant, physically attractive and subordinate within the marriage. We are discouraged from, and often punished for, developing self-reliance, assertiveness, initiative, curiosity, and creativity. We are taught to serve others and to feel guilty if we do not. Developing our own potential and sense of worth for who we are is not encouraged.

Men, on the other hand, are taught to do just the reverse. Their role leads to greater economic, political, physical, and intellectual success and power. Often the pressure to produce and be in control kills the joyful, emotional and vulnerable side of them.

The sad part is that we begin to judge ourselves by how well we fit the prescribed roles. We bounce from one set of "oughts" and "shoulds" until we are increasingly confused, lost and submerged. We need to take steps to become more aware of ourselves and to feel comfortable with that person. To begin that process, we must work on our intellectual, emotional, and physical awareness. One way we lose contact with our emotions, which give us important information, is by holding our breath and contracting our muscles.

Practice deep breathing, relaxing exercises regularly to help gain our sense of selves.

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: INVITED GUESTS**

- 7:00 Read Guidelines/Opening Round
- 7:15 Review Guidelines for visits from invited speakers.
- 7:30 Introduce speaker. Invite them to give an overview of their role.
- 8:00 Break
- 8:15 Question and answer period with invited guest.
- 8:45 Thank invited guest and show them out.
- 8:50 Closing Round

## **GUIDELINES FOR VISITS FROM INVITED SPEAKERS**

It is important that these guidelines be reviewed at the last session before an invited speaker comes, and again on the day of the visit.

Point out to participants that the guest will be able to address general group issues, not any specific woman's circumstances.

Ask participants whether they want the speaker to be asked to stay for the closing round or to leave before that. They may decide to negotiate this during the group.

Point out that individual guests cannot be held responsible for specifics of any one woman's circumstances, but can be expected to address policies of their discipline.

## **SUGGESTED GUEST SPEAKERS**

Lawyer  
Ministry Worker  
Financial Aid Worker  
Teacher  
Crown Prosecutor

Police Representative  
Legal Aid Worker  
Shelter Coordinator  
Public Health Nurse

## **SESSION OUTLINE EXAMPLE: FINAL SESSION**

7:00 Read Guidelines/Opening Round

### **Facilitators:**

In order to make the final session special, ask the women to bring a picture of each of their children with them to this last session. Prepare a certificate for each child and give them out in Exercise 1.

The purpose of this exercise is to have the mothers leave the final session focussing on the positive aspects of their children.

7:15 Exercise 1: What I Like About You

8:00 Break

8:15 Exercise 2: Affirmations

8:50 Closing Round

## **EXERCISE 1**

### **WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU**

- Group members attach the pictures of their children to their respective certificates and then fill in the “What I Like About You” section.
- The women then share the completed certificates with each other.



# **WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU**

**Awarded To**

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**WHAT I REALLY LIKE ABOUT YOU IS THAT YOU ARE:**

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**Presented By**

**MOM**



## **EXERCISE 2**

### **AFFIRMATIONS**

Give each woman a card and have her put her name on it.

- Have the women pass their cards around to all the other group members who will in turn write on each card an affirmation about what they like about that particular woman. No names will be signed.
- Once the women have written on every card but their own, seal the cards and give them out with a small parting gift that symbolizes the group.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER SESSIONS**

**How to Deal with the School System**

**Single Parent Finances, the Cycle of Poverty**

**How to Have Fun for Free, or On Very Little Money**

## **SECTION THREE**

### **SETTING BOUNDARIES AND LIMITS**

Boundaries overlap with norms of the group in some ways and how to set appropriate boundaries is an issue in many groups. There are differences in both the degree of danger participants may be in, as well as their vulnerability. All facilitators need to think about their position on such matters as: which phone number to give to participants, and how much individual communication and contact they should provide.

All circumstances are different, and the authors of this manual don't have all the answers. Some basic guidelines that have been found to be in both the facilitator's and participant's best interests are listed in the following:

#### **Boundaries Related to Contact with Participants between Group Sessions**

1. Remember that the objective is empowerment, not rescuing.
2. In general, it is best if participants have an office number to call, not a home number.
3. If a woman returns to her partner, facilitators should not visit the home.
4. In order to foster group cohesion and discourage facilitator burn out, it is desirable to keep contact with individual women to a minimum between group sessions.

Having said all this, it is important to recognize that these are just guidelines, and individual settings and circumstances must be considered. For example, in a rural setting there may not be an office at which to leave a phone message, and the facilitator must then decide on whether or not she wants to give out her own number. A good reality check is to discuss the decision with the other facilitators and to come to a mutual decision about how to handle the specifics of your group.

It is a possibility that when a participant begins to recognize a facilitator as a knowledgeable and trustworthy person, she may start calling in order to ask for advice or to get individual attention. Again it may be necessary to fill that role in an isolated setting, the important thing is that the facilitator makes an informed decision based on the needs of the woman, not on her own need to be needed.

#### **Establishing Boundaries in Group Sessions**

The kinds of issues that arise in groups generally relate to two things:

1. The degree of self-disclosure that is appropriate and comfortable for the facilitators to share with participants.
2. The degree of outside contact between participants.

In a feminist group a degree of self-disclosure is not only necessary, it is desirable. As discussed earlier, the group is one of equals, each with her own contribution to make. Participants usually need to see some evidence of the

facilitator's willingness to be a fully participating group member before they feel safe. The important guideline in this case is that self-disclosure must be a conscious decision, done with the purpose of enhancing the participants' experience in some way. The appropriate degree is something which each facilitator must reach her own level of comfort with, and it will come with experience.

As a general rule, the degree of outside contact between participants is simply none of the facilitator's business. Women frequently establish friendships in the group and continue their friendships outside – however, this is where the overlap with group norms may occur. It may be necessary, if a friendship develops which is obvious to everyone in group, to acknowledge it and to revisit the beginning discussion about not discussing group issues or group members outside the group. The issue is that each participant needs to feel that she can freely and openly discuss whatever she wants without having to worry about it being discussed outside.

## **TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES**

It is an unfortunate reality that some of the stories you will hear in a group can be very difficult to listen to. Facilitators often end up feeling angry at the way women are misused and abused by the system as well as by their abusers. Sometimes facilitators can begin to feel personally traumatized by exposure to the stories they hear. Burnout is also a very real possibility in this work. It is important that facilitators have some mechanisms in place for their own support as an acknowledgement of these realities.

Debriefing with co-facilitators is one of the most important of these mechanisms. Not only does it provide a good forum for comparing perceptions of the participants and the group process, but it is invaluable as a forum for sharing your own feelings and reactions to the group sessions.

The time needed to complete this process should be viewed as being as much part of the group as the group itself and should never be neglected. You and the co-facilitators need to have built up enough trust that you both feel comfortable talking about feelings and reactions, even if your perceptions differ. In the same way, it is a good idea to have a brief check in before group begins in case there are troubling, unresolved issues from the previous session.

Finally, knowing yourself is one of the best tools for safeguarding your own mental and physical health. It is extremely helpful to know the warning signs of your own distress or burnout. No one can do this for you because everyone's response to stress is unique. Some people, for example, eat more (or less) than usual, have difficulty sleeping or develop chronic headaches when tension is high in their lives. It is also important to realize that distress or burnout can be cumulative and the individual events contributing to it may not, by themselves, appear particularly upsetting. You must remember that your response is valid and your feelings need to be acknowledged and attended to.

## SECTION FOUR

### BOOKS

There are so many books on how to parent that it is difficult to know which is the appropriate one for any particular parenting challenge. Some of the books discussed here are general guides. They are good resource books and can be of help in many child-care/parenting dilemmas.

Many of the books listed contain their own bibliography to point you in the direction of other valuable books on parenting.

Librarians can also help you find books to assist in resolving parenting problems. Whenever possible discuss the ideas found in the books with other single mothers. You can be valuable resources to each other.

### BASIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Brazelton, T. B. *To Listen to a Child: Understanding the Normal Problems of Growing Up*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984.

This book, written in a very supportive, empathetic manner, explores common childhood issues from both the child's and parents' viewpoint. Brazelton points out that many of the normal childhood problems such as fears, feeding and sleep problems, stomach aches, asthma, etc., can be minimized if parents learn to listen to their children's anxiety. By listening and not adding more tension and guilt, excess pressure is removed and the problems often go away or cease to be "problems." Problems and issues are considered from a developmental approach. This is a very useful resource book for infancy to adolescence.

Brazelton, T. B. *Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1992.

This most recent guide by Brazelton addresses common concerns and questions about your child's emotional and behavioural development from birth to six years. Along with describing regular childhood development, Brazelton includes topics that deal with depression, divorce, hyperactivity, fears, discipline, loss, grief, self-esteem, sleep problems and many others. Again, this is a straightforward, easy to read book with a lot of valuable information and advice.

Leach, P. *Your Baby and Child from Birth to Age Five*. New York, NY: A.A. Knopf, 1978.

A valuable age-specific guide to baby and preschool care. Leach is a mother and a psychologist whose advice to parents is "go by the baby not by the book." This advice, however, is backed up with very supportive guidance given in a sensitive, caring manner allowing for each parent's own intuitive approach to caring for their child. Highly recommended by many health-care workers.

Princeton Center for Infancy. *The Parenting Advisor*. F. Caplan, ed. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1978.

An encyclopedic guide to parenting compiled by child-rearing specialists and parents. There are short but fairly thorough sections on most aspects of growth and development from infancy to the preschool years. The chapter, "Today's Family," addresses the special concerns of parenting related to single-parenting, the working parent, babysitters, daycare, divorce, separation, and moving.

Spock, B. *Baby and Childcare*. Revised Ed. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1976.

Probably the best known name on the subject of baby care. Spock has been guiding parents through the stages from birth to adolescence on most aspects of childcare for several generations. Spock's manner is also very supportive of parents, recognizing and encouraging their own intuitive childcare abilities. A good resource guide covering most practical and many psychological issues of baby and childcare.

## **DIVORCE – BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

Boeckman, C. *Surviving Your Parents' Divorce*. New York, NY: Watts, 1980.

A book written for older children and teenagers whose parents are either about to, in the midst of, or already have split up. The style is a bit more grownup than Gilbert's book (below), but essentially offers similar advice and support. Each section is written from a child's point of view, which makes the text interesting and readable for kids experiencing their parent's divorce.

Gilbert, S. *How to Live with a Single Parent*. New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1982.

For older children and teens whose parents have divorced or separated, or whose mother or father has died, or who have always lived in a single-parent family. Written in a style kids can easily understand and relate to, it includes a "source for support" section with titles of both non-fiction self-help guides and action books whose characters are also learning to live in single-parent families.

## **DIVORCE – BOOKS FOR PARENTS**

Adler, R.E. *Sharing the Children: How to Resolve Custody Problems and Get On with Your Life*. Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1988.

A guide book on working out a realistic, livable solution to divorce and custody problems. The author, a clinical psychologist, provides stage-by-stage guidance through the divorce process. He gives supportive, practical advice in the hope that all affected by the divorce will end up "winning".

Included are three appendices which may be particularly helpful:

1. *Where You Stand: A Self-Help Checklist for Parents*

A questionnaire to help you determine objectively how you see your ex-spouse as a parent, and what to do with that information.

2. *Age-Appropriate Schedules*

A developmental guide from birth to eighteen; what's important, what to watch for, some possible parenting plans, and what to do if problems arise.

3. *Stages of Divorce*

- a) Before the breakup;    b) Separating;    c) Crazy time;
- d) A new beginning;    e) A new identity.

(Includes a comprehensive booklist for divorce, custody, child development, mothering and fathering, and legal matters.)

Ahrons, C.R. *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together when Your Marriage Comes Apart*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1994.

This book by Ahrons, a well known family therapist and professor of sociology, provides guidance on how to meet the needs of your family after divorce. By redefining and removing the stigma of divorce she teaches us strategies that encourage healthy family development and strengthen family bonds. Through her experience as a family therapist she is able to teach us methods that are effective in dealing with all aspects of divorce, and presents the aftermath of divorce in a hopeful, rather than damaging, light.

Bienenfeld, F. *Helping Your Child Succeed after Divorce*. Claremont, CA: Hunter House, 1987.

This book is written by a woman marriage and family counsellor who has worked extensively in the areas of divorce, mediation and conciliation. The purpose of her book is to assist the divorcing parent(s) to provide a secure and nurturing environment for their children after divorce, in spite of their own pain. Although empathizing with the parent's anger and sense of futility, the author's real focus is on the effect of divorce on the developing child's life and how the resulting pain can be minimized for the child.

teens and their parents face in the 90's. This easy to read book helps parents deal with issues that are essential to teens. Guidance is provided in the crucial areas of self-esteem, sexuality, peer groups, depression, mood swings, need for privacy, confronting violence and drug and alcohol abuse, as well as many others. This is an interesting and valuable resource for parents of teens.

Faber, A. & E. Mazlish. *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family*. New York, NY: Grosset and Dunlap, 1974.

The authors introduce the ideas of Haim Ginott (*Between Parent and Child: New Solutions to Old Problems*. New York: Macmillan, 1965), to demonstrate that children respond far more favourably and cooperatively to being treated with respect and compassion, than they do to judgement and criticism. The message here is, the process we use to parent our child determines the kind of human being that the child will become. It is written from the point of view of a fictional mother, who together with other mothers attends a weekly parenting course led by Ginott. Parenting successes and failures are recounted at the weekly sessions where the group discusses alternative ways of dealing with parenting dilemmas. Very readable.

Faber, A. & E. Mazlish. *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. New York, NY: Avon, 1982.

The how-to companion guide to *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children*, above. How to listen to and understand your child's concerns; how to have co-operation in your family – without nagging; how you and your children deal with feelings, how to find alternatives to punishment; how to help your child attain a positive self-image. This book provides examples and exercises to help teach parents the skills presented in *Liberated Parents, Liberated Children*. The text is personalized and the style humorous – very easy to read. Examples of dialogues are presented in cartoons showing the way to and the way not to talk, and to listen to your children. If there is just not enough time in your life to read parenting books, try to make time to read this one.

Fraiberg, Selma. *The Magic Years: Understanding and Handling the Problems of Early Childhood*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1959.

Fraiberg is a child therapist whose approach to parenting is based on the developmental stage the child is currently in. Her primary focus is how to help your children develop a healthy conscience. She explains that by understanding why your children act the way they do as a result of their developmental stage, parents will have a much better quality of understanding that can provide the right answers at critical moments. This book is of particular use for families with preschoolers, as a large section discusses the developmental and behavioural issues of that group.

## VIDEO

*Seen But Not Heard.* Vancouver: B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, 1993.

Documentary interviews and dramatic scenes are combined in this video to focus on the point of view of a child witness to violence. The serious effect on children in this situation in their homes is explored in a docudrama style designed for general audiences, and those who work with children, abused women, and assaultive men.

## FINDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Community resources tend to come and go on a regular basis. When your resource numbers or locations are not current and no forwarding directions are given, try Vancouver Status of Women, at (604) 255-5511. The Vancouver Status of Women has also recently published an excellent guide titled, *Vancouver and Lower Mainland Single Mothers' Resource Guide*, which provides information on housing, social services, childcare and many other issues important to single mothers.

Other places you can contact for up to date information may include:

Local Health Units; Women's Centres; Community and Recreation Centres; Local Schools; Your Children's Teachers; Battered Women's Support Services; Transition Houses and Shelters; B.C. Institute on Family Violence; or the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Ottawa, toll free, 1-800-267-1291.