



Parenting Through Separation Evaluation

Jeremy Robertson and Jan Pryor
Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families
Victoria University of Wellington

1

- Background - the PTS programme
- Research questions and methods
- Results –
 - ‘Best practice’
 - Running the course
 - Parents needs
 - Post course evaluation
 - Programme impact
- Summary

2

PTS programme goals

Broad Objectives -

- Educate parents so they can understand and manage the effect of separation on children.
- Improve the maintenance of children's connections with both parents and their wider families.
- Minimise the negative effects of parental separation on children and thereby lower the risk of further negative outcomes for those children.

3

Specific goals –

- Increase parents' knowledge of the effect of their separation on children.
- Help parents communicate more effectively with their children.
- Reduce children's exposure to parental conflict.
- Help parents communicate more effectively with each other.
- Encourage parents to adopt plans and make arrangements that are in the best interests of their children.

4

- Encourage parents to resolve care and custody disputes without resorting to court proceedings.
- Increase parents' knowledge of services available to support and assist their family.

5

Programme delivery

- Run by a range of contracted providers.
- Parents attend separate courses.
- Includes DVDs, handouts and activities.
- Covers ten topics.
- Usually run as 2 x 2 hours sessions.
- Usually by two facilitators.

6

Session 1:

- Topic 1: Children need parents who understand what separation is like for kids.
- Topic 2: Children need parents who protect them from adult conflict.
- Topic 3: Children need parents who help them get through the tough times (introduces community support services).
- Topic 4: Children need parents who are willing to try changes to make things better.

7

Session 2:

- Topic 5: Recap
- Topic 6: Best arrangements for children are made by parents who put their children's interests first.
- Topic 7: Best arrangements for children are made by the parents themselves, involving children when they are willing and able.
- Topic 8: Best arrangements for children are where parents try to avoid conflict with their ex-partners.
- Topic 9: Best arrangements for children hardly ever involve a Family Court hearing.
- Topic 10: Best arrangements for children require commitment from parents.

8

Main research questions

- Assess programme design and delivery against best practice.
- Assess the quality of programme materials.
- Assess programme up-take.
- Assess programme design and programme delivery for specific groups.

9

- Assess how well the programme is meeting parents' information needs.
- Assess extent to which programme has impact on parental conflict, parents communication, satisfaction with care arrangements, children witnessing conflict, and child behaviour.

10

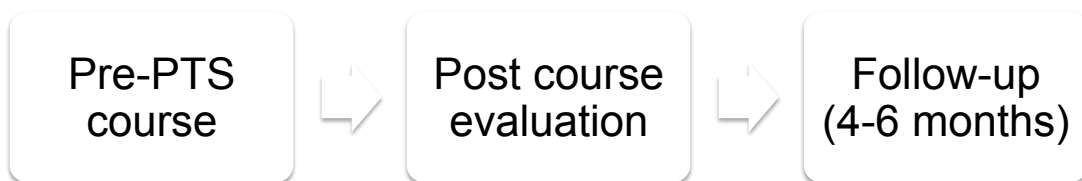
Method

Information from -

- Review of programme materials in terms of 'best practice' (or 'consensus')
- Registration and evaluation forms (post course)
- Key informants interview
- Providers survey
- Survey of Participants pre and post programme

11

Parents survey design



Repeated measures, pre-course and at follow-up
Major limitation - No control/comparison group

12

Repeated Measures

Frequency of specific behaviours/actions

(McKenzie & Guberman, 1996) —

- Children in the middle of parental conflict,
- general parental conflict,
- joint parenting post separation, and
- use of low contact strategies (e.g. e-mail).

- Child behaviour - Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire (Goodman).

13

Levels of agreement with statements regarding -

- issues of separation,
- satisfaction with care, contact and support,
- knowledge related to separation issues,
- adjustment in relation to the separation/divorce,
- satisfaction with parent-child relationships,
- the importance of the child's best interests in making care arrangements, and
- confidence in reaching agreement in the future.

(McKenzie & Guberman, 1996)

14

The Sample

Data source	Number of responses
Parent registration forms	4406
Parent post-programme evaluations	3979
Survey of parents -	
Pre-programme	119
Follow-up of those who completed pre-programme survey (*83%)	81
Programme provider survey	40
Key informant interviews	42

15

Results – ‘best practice’

Appears to meet best practice standards –

- Child focused.
- Covers a broad range of relevant topics in the time available.
- Has clear goals and a programme manual helps maintain a child-focus.
- There is also a good variety of supporting materials (e.g. DVDs, including for children).
- Need for ongoing training and support.

16

Results – running the course

- 4406 parents attended between May 2006 and Sept 2008.
- Female (62%) vs. Male (38%).
- Age range 16 yrs to 75 years, mean age 38 years.
- Ethnic groups in proportion to population, except more Tongan and fewer Asian.
- In proportion to regional distribution population.

17

- In each area multiple providers contracted to run course.
- Mix major NGO providers (e.g. relationship Services) and local community providers.
- Some providers for specific cultures - Maori, Pacific and Asian.
- Lower than expected referrals.
- Competition within regions.
- Some providers had not run programme and had withdrawn.

18

What parents hope to get from the course

More understanding towards what my child needs in the near future from me and his mother, help towards making things work with me and the child's mother without all the fighting/ disagreements.

Ways of dealing with ex-partner due to his anger and abuse since separation.

How to communicate with my son better. How to let him know why he doesn't see his father.

Positive ways of dealing with the anger and stress so it doesn't impact so much on my child.

19

Post course evaluations

Agree with statement (n=max 3979)	Percent
The programme was interesting	95
I would tell friends to go	93
The programme helped me understand how separation affects children	93
I am going to try to work out a parenting plan for the care of my children	84
The programme helped me to understand how the Family Court works	85
The programme will help me talk with my children	84
I learned new ways to keep my children out of my arguments/fights with my (ex) partner	82
The programme will help me talk with my (ex) partner	70

20

Surveyed parents at follow-up

- Care arrangements still being actively negotiated between parents, including through the Family Court.
- Evidence of increased child contact with parents and extended family.
- Majority (82%) reported that the course had increased their knowledge of the effects of separation on children.
- Over three quarters (84%) said that the course had met their information needs.

21

Of those with older children, the majority (77%) said that the course had **helped them to talk to their children** regarding the separation and care arrangements.

Yes made me feel more courageous. Less afraid of what they might say.

I learnt to explain things without blaming anybody so that she doesn't feel she has to take sides in the future.

Enabled me to be more persistent and give the boys words that they could use to describe their thoughts.

22

- Attending the programme had **increased their knowledge of services** (38%).
- The most commonly cited new services were those offered by the Family Court, including counselling and mediation.
- Others mentioned services for children and supervised contact services.
- Some parents commented that they did not learn about any new services because they had already done their own research to identify relevant services.

23

Made a positive contribution to the way they **communicated with their ex-partner** (58%).

As a result of attending PTS we maintain a focus on our son and our behaviour and decision-making is based around the effects on him (Our son).

I have had my eyes opened to many more non-confrontational ways to communicate.

Made me think about it more and helped me communicate more positively.

24

Cooperated more with their **ex-partner** regarding the **day to day care of their children** (28%).

The programme is a silent reminder to me to maintain patience with my ex-partner regarding day-to-day care and contact.

I avoid direct contact and email him my schedule so he knows what is coming up. Then he is prepared when I ask him to help or be involved.

Yes, a little, but because he is not interested in attending the course or doing any of the things I suggest from the course, it is difficult.

25

Impact – Parent and child needs pre. vs. follow-up

Parent & child needs¹	Mean (sd)	Sign.	N
Conflict – children caught in the middle	1.5 (.47)	t=2.46, p=.016	79
General parental conflict	2.2 (.75)	t=4.05, p=.000	79
Parenting statements	3.4 (.59)	ns.	80
Joint parenting	2.5 (.81)	ns.	75
Low contact between parents	3.2 (1.1)	ns.	63

¹ – scale goes from 1- almost never to 4-almost always

26

Impact – Issues regarding separation Pre. vs. follow-up

Issues of separation¹	Mean (sd)	Sign.	N
Level of Satisfaction with Care, Contact and Support	3.5 (1.2)	t= - 2.4, p=.017	72
Levels of Knowledge Related to Separation Issues	3.9 (.60)	t= -9.4, p=.000	79
Level of Adjustment in Relation to the Separation/ Divorce	3.6 (.86)	t= -6.2, p=.000	79

¹ – scale goes from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree

27

Changes in Child behaviour

Pre course SDQ - twice percentage 'abnormal' scores, compared to community sample.

At follow-up statistically significant reduction in –

- Total difficulties score (t=2.9, df=67; p=.005)
- Conduct problems (t=3.6, df=67; p=.001)
- Emotional problems (t=2.1, df=67; p=.038)

28

Key findings

- Largely positive outcomes, but need comparison group more more robust impact assessment.
- High levels of satisfaction.
- Main problem was getting people along to the course. Make it mandatory? Advertise? Privacy concerns?
- Getting both parents to attend a course.
- Relatively less success helping participants talk to their ex-partner, especially about day to day care.

29

The report

Robertson, J.P. and Pryor, J. (2009)
Evaluation of the 'Parenting Through
Separation' programme,

[http://www.justice.govt.nz/publications/
global-publications/e/evaluation-of-the-
parenting-through-separation-programme/
evaluation-of-parenting](http://www.justice.govt.nz/publications/global-publications/e/evaluation-of-the-parenting-through-separation-programme/evaluation-of-parenting)

30