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DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE:THE ADJUSTMENT OF CHILDREN

Abstract

It is important that we learn how to make the remarried suprasystem work best for children and adults. For the children in remarried families, the multiplicity of relationships, personalities, values, and lifestyles can be extremely enriching, devastating or a combination of both. The child experiences a combination of home lives that he or she would not have been exposed to in an intact family. Under the best circumstances and with non-hostile co-parenting, the remarried family can provide a healthy alternate family life style for the child.

Increasing public awareness of the incidence of remarriage, and having research provide us with the information that the adjustment to remarried life style is difficult for all concerned, even under the best psychological and material circumstances, is reflected in the fact that parents now focus on problems sooner, and some parents even seek preventive help before remarriage in the form of educational and supportive community resources. Schools also help by having class discussions about separation, divorce and remarriage, and teachers are alert to look for effects of family disruption in their classes and to seek help when necessary.

In my clinical work with children of remarried families, I am getting referrals of children and adults before problems are of crisis proportion, although crisis situations are still in the majority. I continue to emphasis the importance of including in assessment, and if indicated, in treatment too, all involved members of the child's suprasystem. To exclude noncustodial parents, stepparents, or involved grandparents will usually

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mean that the therapeutic outcome will be limited since the child is leaving each session only to return to an unchanged and unhealthy environment.

***Keywords**: divorce, remarriage, adaptation of children*

A child whose parent remarries is a child who has experienced the separation and divorce of his parents or the death of one parent. Such events are important and meaningful at any developmental level. The process of working through such changes and accepting the remarriage at any developmental level has a spectrum of responses. For some children the remarriage may be welcomed, while other children may never accept parent's remarriage. On the other hand some children, with time and adult support, may find a place for themselves in the remarried family.

The discussion that follows will focus on issues affecting children mostly under age of 12. The relevant literature will be briefly reviewed. The major stress points for the child will be outlined. The effect of these stress points on child's development and coping patterns will be considered. In addition, variables that are found to be significant for the child to succeed in remarried family and what the child may experience emotionally and intellectually will be discussed. In conclusion, the article will review different problems children in remarried families often manifest as well as some of the special issues in dealing with these problems.

Research on the children of divorce

The most extensive work on divorcing families has been done by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980). They used the developmental stages of children to explore the different effects of divorce on children at varying ages. A constant finding that held for all age groups is that the quality and consistency of the custodial parental relationship is crucial to the successful adjustment of the child to the separation. Their findings in combination with others are summarized in Appendix A.

Tessman (1978) uses extensive case material and substantiates Wallerstein and Kelly's finding of the importance of the child's relationship with the remaining parent in helping the child adjust to the change. Age in

itself appeared to be less prognostic of the degree to which the child worked through the loss than were several other factors such as the custodial parent's well-being; the child's relationship to the parents before the loss and their manner of coping with stress, and the availability of appropriately supportive relationships during the period of change.

Lamb (1977) reviewed the relevant research conducted by developmental psychologists and from that data evaluated the effects of divorce on children's personality development. First, he concludes that the children of divorced parents, compared with the children of intact families, are "at risk" for psychological damage. Secondly, he states that it is not possible to talk about "effects of divorce" in general terms since divorce may be beneficial to children as it signals the termination of hostilities, trauma, violence, and hatred. On the other hand, family dissolution and the associated disruptions in important relationship can be damaging to the psychosocial adjustment of young children.

Research on the adjustment of the children to stepfamilies

The professional literature concerning stepchildren and stepparents is limited and not easily generalizable. In research about stepchildren, the primary issues addressed is whether children in remarried families fare better, as well, or worse in terms of their "mental health" as children living in intact families. The research has not been conclusive.

Bernard (1971) investigated the mental health of children using university students and found no significant difference in terms of stability, self sufficiency, or dominance compared to non-stepchildren

Bohannan (1975) focused on stepfathers and stepchildren, finding that stepchildren rated themselves as happy, successful, and achieving as often as did non-stepchildren with their biofathers. He found that stepfathers may be promulgating negative images of themselves, since biological fathers rated their children as significantly happier than the stepfather rated their stepchildren, although neither the mothers nor the stepchildren perceived themselves as less happy. Bohannan concluded that the outcome for children with stepfathers is the same as with biological

fathers and that what may ultimately be more important to understand is the specific kinds of adjustment such children need to make, and the long-term effects on the character structure that relationships with two or more father figures might create.

Other researchers have found that the mental health consequences for children living in remarried families are worse than living in a divorced family, and both are worse than living in an intact family. Langer and Michael (1963) and Rosenberg (1965) each used large-scale random samples of stepchildren and found that the mental health of the stepchildren compared adversely with non-stepchildren. Similarly, Bowerman and Irish (1962) found that the relationship of stepchildren to their stepparent, as well as to their remarried bioparent, were marked by greater levels of uncertainty of feelings, insecurity of position, than were those to be found in non-stepfamily homes. The authors also found that stepfathers appear to fare better than the stepmothers with stepchildren. They also found a higher average adjustment towards the stepparent when the previous marriage was ended by divorce rather than death.

Much of the recent literature addressing children's adjustment in remarried families has come mainly from cross –sectional studies. The Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage followed a group of target children (9-11 years old) in nondivorced, divorced single-mother, and stepfather families over 26 months. They found that children in divorced and remarried families were reported to have more externalized behavioral problems than those from nondivorced families. Both stepfathers and mothers saw children as less competent and having more academic and behavioral problems. Since, teachers did not share the level of concern as stepparents and parents, it was concluded that behavioral problems may be more common at home than at school. As in previous studies (Bray, 1990; Hetherington, 1989) Hetherington and Clingempeel reported that initial reported adjustment difficulties remained as children moved towards adolescence, and some behavioral problems actually emerged during adolescence. Younger children appeared to adjust better to their parent' remarriage (Hetherington, 1989, Bray, 1990).

Bray and Berger (1993) reported findings from a cross-sectional, longitudinal study of intact families and stepfather families with a target

child between the ages of 6 and 8 years. They found that children in stepfamilies of 6 months duration and those in stepfamilies of 5-7 years duration had more behavioral problems, stress, and lower social competency than children in intact families. Importantly, however, they reported that a large majority of children in stepfamilies were functioning within a normal range on all adjustment indicators.

Findings form the National Survey of Children (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993) show that after controlling for the effects of socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, youth in disrupted families were twice as likely to exhibit problems as youth from nondisrupted families. They concluded that remarriage did not have a protective effect, but that it ameliorated some effects for those children who experienced marital disruption early and for whom remarriage remained intact. They suggested that a remarriage following parental divorce that occurs later in the child's life is more problematic for children's adjustment. This finding was supported by the studies of Hetherington (1988) and Bray (1990) as noted before.

Other studies have reported useful information about child adjustment and various factors that affect child outcomes. For example, a Michigan study (Barber & Lyons, 1994) found that that adolescents reported in stepfamilies similar level of permissiveness and family democratic decision-making compared to adolescents in intact families, but they reported more family conflict and less family cohesion. Furthermore, Hoffman (1994) found that older teens (14-17 years of age) who were living in stepfamilies reported to be less attached to their families than were teens from intact families. That finding also helps explain the greater frequency of change in living arrangement initiated by these adolescents.

Regarding child outcomes specifically and using data from the National Survey of Families and Households, Gorman and Forste (1994) reported that young adults who had lived with a stepparent rather than two bioparents were more likely to form an intimate union before age 20. The unions entered were more likely to be cohabitational rather than legal marriage. Upchurch (1993) found that living in a stepfamily was associated with the likelihood of dropping out of school, giving birth while a teen, and being less likely to attain post secondary education. Coffman and Roark (1992) reported that adolescents in stepfamilies were less likely to

participate in extracurricular activities, read books, go to the library and spend time with friends or family. A study that compared adolescents in intact, remarried, or single-parent families (Du Troit, Nel, & Steel, 1992), found that family structure did not influence either positively or negatively children's personality development. Other research shows that children in stepfamilies are not at greater risk for certain health issues, such as obesity (Lissau & Sorenen, 1994). However, it is important to notice that child outcomes differ for children living with stepfathers versus stepmothers. Fine and Kurdek (1992) reported higher levels of self esteem and fewer social problems among stepchildren living with stepfather compared to those living with stepmother.

Many of the outcomes reported here are also associated with single-parent households. It is difficult to know exact contribution of parental remarriage to poor child adjustment. It may be that most of the negative effects can be attributed to pre-divorce conditions as suggested by Furstenberg and Teitler (1994) or post divorce effects of which parental remarriage is only one.

When research compared clinical and nonclinical remarried families to identify the ways in which they differ, Brown, Green, and Druckman (1990) found more conflict, less expressiveness, less satisfaction with the stepparent role, and less role reciprocity by the stepchild in response to the stepparent's initiatives in clinical stepfamilies. Bray (1992) compared the family relationship processes and children's adjustment in a small sample of clinical and nonclinical stepfather families. He found that parents in clinical stepfamilies reported children as having more problem behaviors, less prosocial behaviors, and being more shy and withdrawn than children in nonclinical families. Clinical stepfamilies were observed to have more negative and less positive parent-to child interactions.

In summary, the research reviewed here offers no surprises. In general, the research has begun to specify the components of family relationships with more precision. The antecedent conditions under which stepfamily relationships develop or are maintained are being examined with more sophisticated methods of data gathering and analysis. However, for the most part, theoretical framework as a guide to research still seems to be lacking.

Major stress points for the child

The individual life cycle of the child is disrupted initially with the separation of the bioparents. In the family life cycle the child becomes a member of two singe-parent families. This cycle is disrupted again with the remarriage of one or both bioparents, which adds one or two new family life –cycle tracks. What follows is a description of the child's experience in the process of becoming a remarried family. The response of the child is contingent on genetic, developmental, systemic, intrapsychic, and environmental influences.

Loss Caused by Disruption in the Household

Prior to separation, the child is a witness to covert or overt conflict between the parents. He or she may be excluded from their difficulties or drown in as one who is blamed or used in the struggle of one parent against the other. The child may have failed at being expected to "cure" a failing marriage, or his/her normal developmental needs may have "caused" the conflict between the parents. One or both parents may have used inappropriately the child as a confident and advisor, or the parents' problems may have been kept a "secret." The child may blame him or herself as the cause of parents' problems and experience the impending threat to his or her security. He or she may feel abandonment, which then seems a reality when one parent actually leaves the household. Also the reality of his or hers parents' actions and decisions may play into his or hers fantasized wishes and/or fears.

When a parent is ill, the child's other parent may also be unavailable emotionally or physically due to having to take care of the ill spouse. The child may be put in a position to witness frightening and/or overwhelming medical procedures and to watch helplessly as the formerly well parent deteriorates, while his or hers own needs no longer can be tended to.

If the parent's death happens to be accidental or sudden, there is no time to prepare and the child precipitously experiences a major loss. With the parent's death, the child may be part of funeral rituals that may help him or her with the loss, or cause further trauma, or he or she may be lied to and kept excluded. There may be feelings of quilt, self-blame, anger, sadness, fear, or relief.

In both death and separation, the child loses his or hers "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1965). Since the two-parent home in which the child was nurtured is no longer available, depending on the circumstances, the child may become pseudo-independent or regress to an earlier developmental level. How the child will adjust also depends on the specific circumstances, and his or her level of development. Wallerstein and Kelly summarize their findings in their book (1980). With the youngest children (under 18 months), if the supportive environment continues, there is likely to be less reaction in the child than between 18 months and 39 months, where regression would be common and expected, as well as bewilderment, aggression, and increased demandingness. With children between four and six years of age, quilt, depression, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, tantrums, and separation problems may be pronounced. With younger latency children, there may be a loss of age-appropriate defenses, as with older children, intense anger at parents and significant problems in school. Sager (1983) as well as Ahrons and Rogers (1987) report that those children, who have had uninterrupted support of both bioparents after divorce, and where the parents are able to maintain conflict free relationship, develop the least amount of psychological problems.

Double single-parent household

With separation, both parents have their own household. Both parents may desire to be part of child's care system and to provide emotions, physical, and financial support. These parents seek to cooperate around their children and form a co-parenting team.

After separation, the child is typically in mother's physical custody with visits to his or her father. The child may experience immediate relief that the hostility of the marriage has ended. With death, the surviving parent may be depressed and consequently unavailable to the child. In such instances the child is at high risk. Typically, the mother may return to work and there may be a radical shift downward in the family's standard of living. Mother and child may return to live with the maternal grandparents who may then become surrogate parents. This attachment may be life-saving for some children. However, if the mother is once again a child in her parents' household, and then a peer to her own child, the child runs the risk of another loss. There can be a marital-like bonding between the

custodial parent and the child and intensification of Oedipal wishes and fears, particularly from age four to six. In response to this, the child may become extremely enmeshed or defend against the inappropriate close bonding by opposition and hostility. He or she may parent the parent and be overly concerned with the parent's well being, or may have to parent a sibling.

When the custodial or surviving parent begins to date and becomes increasingly involved with a new partner, the child is in danger of being extruded and there is the threat of another loss. The child may become symptomatic, withdraw, compete with his or hers parent for or against the new mate, display hostility, align with the grandparents against the parent, or even leave the home in favor of the other parent's household. If there is loyalty to the dead or absent parent, or unresolved mourning, the resistance to the new parenting figure may be extremely intense.

It is important in the "single" stage for both parents to demonstrate love to their children and to be available to them, but it is also important to help them maintain their age –appropriate roles and to know that their parents have adult friends, including those of opposite sex, who are important to them. Thus, when mother or father remarries, the children have known their stepparent and have gradually redefined their relationship with the person who first was the parent's friend, then the parent's lover, and then live-in mate or spouse.

As increasing numbers of former spouses who share visiting or custody arrangements are on good co-parenting terms, the ex-spouse should be told of an upcoming marriage or committed relationship (move in) before it happens and preferably directly by the former spouse. This helps to defuse reactions that could be hurtful to the children.

Occurrence of Remarriage

The child's fantasy of uniting his or hers bioparents is challenged when one parent remarries. Younger children who may have imagined or wished that a dead parent would return can be struck with the finality of the death at the time of remarriage. While to the parent the remarriage is a

joyful occasion, to many children the wedding is a time of mourning, with a renewed sense of loss.

The child may experience the remarriage as a "second divorce," particularly if he or she played the role of surrogate mate or there was a quasi-symbiotic relationship during the "single" stage. At the time of remarriage the child's role is disrupted by a new spouse. Furthermore, if there are stepsiblings the child's ordinal position as youngest or oldest, or as the only boy or only girl also may be changed.

Although to the parent remarriage may mean the anticipation of greater stability, to the child it may mean changes in role, living arrangement, standard of living, school, and peers. Once again he or she has to deal with two "parents" in a household, as well as siblings who may be strangers. The relationship with the noncustodial parent and with grandparents, who may not have yet relinquished their interim role of surrogate parents, may be affected. The child's live-in household may also change as children from the "other family" visit with their noncustodial parent on weekends.

The child has involuntary become a part of an extremely complicated family system without having knowledge of its structure and function. In addition, child's expectations are based on the experience in his or hers intact family, popular screen and television ideas about family living, books, his or hers fantasies of a "new life" as well as prejudiced folklore about the stepfamily living. The remarried family's goal of consolidating into a viable unit must consider the child's previous life and the issues that remain unresolved for him or her.

Variables affecting the child's successful adaptation to remarried family

There are several variables that facilitate or impede the child's adaptation to remarried family. These include constitutional, intrapsychic, historical, interact ional, and environmental factors.

Constitutional and Intrapsychic

Constitutional and intrapsychic variables are strong determinants of the way the child meets life situations and his or her "fit" in the family system. His or her intrapsychic dynamics, the personality strengths and deficits, shape the options available to him or her for coping with change and stress, as well as the way he or she deals with the conflicts within, his family system, and subsystems. All of these variables influence how he or she will adjust to remarried family and how the remarried family will integrate the child.

The child's age at the time of remarriage is influential as well. According to research, the very young child, under age of five, and older adolescents, above age of 18, tend to assimilate into remarried family easier than the children in between.

Mourning the Loss of the Intact Family

The way in which the bioparents responded to the loss involved in the marital breakup is meaningful for the child and affects his or her ability to use remarried family as a positive influence. If the parents are unable to mourn the loss of the spouse and the intact family, they will be unable to provide good-enough pathway for the child to mourn. The child who has not properly mourned will experience difficulty accepting the remarried family.

Where there has been intense bonding between the child and his or her custodial parent during the double single-parent stage, both parent and child may find it difficult to relinquish this exclusivity and allow room for the stepparent. The time span between marriages is an important variable also. If double single parenthood lasts a long time, the parent-child roles may be rigidified and become resistant to change. However, if the period of single parenthood is short, it is likely that the mourning processes have not been completed for the child or the parent. Based on my clinical observations, I would suggest not less than one year and up to three years to be the optimum period of time for single parenthood after divorce.

Which Parent in Which Household Remarries

Currently mostly often women retain custody of their children. This means that in the vast majority of remarried families the custodial children have a stepfather. Stepmothers predominate in the non-custodial households. Yet it is the stepmother who is most often cast in the role of the wicked stepparent. The wicked stepmother myth may in part be based on a prior historical time when only men had legal status. Custody of a child, with rare exception was placed with the father. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that the "tender years" presumption evolved, and custody of a child was moved in the direction of the mother because she was seen to be more nurturing and more crucial to the developing child during the first seven years (Wald, 1981).

Each type of household, with visiting children or custodial children, presents its own challenges. The most complex situation is where both remarried adults are custodial parents. Perhaps equally complex is where one remarried adult is a custodial parent and the other is a visited parent. Custodial children leave, and visiting children arrive, and often not at the same time.

Based on my clinical observation, it is more difficult for the child when it is the custodial parent who remarries rather than the visited parent. It is not uncommon that the remarriage of a visited parent may motivate the custodial parent to make a major shift such as to begin to date, move-in with someone, move to another city, or state and so forth creating more changes for the child.

The Relationship between the Bioparents

If there is ongoing hostility between the bioparents, the child's adaptation to remarried family is more difficult. The hostility is often played out by using the child as a messenger between households (" Tell you mother ….") or negatively identifying him or her with the ex-spouse ("You are just like your father.")

The child needs to be emotionally permitted from both bioparents to become integrated into remarried family unit. If he or she perceives that his or her unmarried bioparent is unhappy, the child may feel too guilty to begin to attach to the stepparent. When a parent has died, the child needs a sense that the deceased parent would have approved of the remarriage, and the child's new parental bond. Sometimes this is achieved by the approval of the surviving grandparents, sometimes through discussion with the surviving parent, or approval of other members of the remarried family system.

When a custodial parent has remarried, that parent may be freed from the burdens of single parenthood and may become more accessible to the child. However, there can be withdrawal from the child because of the new marital and familial responsibilities. In these instances the remarriage is another loss for the child and may affect his or hers development negatively. It is up to the remarrying parent to maintain the connection with his or her child, despite any possible rejections, withdrawals, and hostility from the child.

Contractual expectations

Children as well as adults enter remarried family with a variety of expectations, both conscious and unconscious, stated and unstated. These expectations relate to what the child expects to receive from the parent, stepparent, and stepsiblings, and what he or she expects to give in return. They also relate to what he or she expects the family as a whole to be, who will have the authority over whom, how responsibilities will be divided, what the behavioral and cultural ground rules might be put in place. The child has a set of expectations of what he or she wishes to receive and to give, similar to the "contracts" of two marital partners.

What is crucial is to what extend the child's contract matches or conflicts with those of the other remarried family members. For example, the child may want to depend on his stepparent as a parent, while the stepparent may expect more of a pal or peer-like relationship with the child. Often the custodial parent expects his or her new spouse to take over rearing and or discipline of the child, while the child expects that the bioparent will continue to be the primary caretaker. It is not uncommon that

the childless stepparent will see in the child the opportunity to have reciprocal parent-child love fulfilled, while the child sees this demand as disloyal to his or her other bioparent. Or, the child may see the remarriage as a chance to re-experience a more complete parental home with structure and stability, while the parent's and stepparent's contracts are to be primarily mates and secondarily parents. All the possible contractual conflicts between the child and the family, their intensity, and how they are resolved contribute to the child's adjustment in remarried family system.

Stepsibling subsystem

The children's sub-system of the original intact family experiences changes prior to the remarriage. With the separation of the parent, the children may remain physically in one household or be split between the two households. Emotionally they may join together in a compensatory dependent relationship or they may remain isolated from one another. Their reaction is very much determined by their parent's needs and availability to them.

The subsystem of children from the intact family probably has been stabilized by the time of the remarriage. Remarriage causes another disruption in the sibling subsystem. Child's ordinal position and roles may change, competition may be intensified if stepsiblings are of the same age or of the same sex, and the responsible oldest may suddenly be the youngest of the household and losing all the special privileges.

On the other hand, the stepsibling subsystem can facilitate the adjustment of children to remarried family ("We are all in this together") or can be maladaptive, especially when there is a great deal of competition for the attention from adults and when there are striking differences in school achievement and financial resources.

Sometimes stepsiblings know each other from school or the community and have established a friendship before their respective parents remarried. They then find themselves together in a household as "siblings." This is a radical shift in roles, degree of intimacy, and level of relating.

Life-cycle Conflict

The degree to which the child's life-cycle stage or developmental needs blend or conflict with the phases of remarried family will influence positively or negatively the child's prognosis for a successful adjustment and ability to develop in a growth –nurturing environment. For example, a build in conflict exists between the child's needs for parenting and the remarried couple's need for period of romantic bonding.

Frequently, problems arise in a remarried family when there is a pre-pubescent child who is rapidly becoming aware of his or her sexuality. With parental remarriage still in the short-term bonding stage, sexuality and romance may pervade the household and be over stimulating to the youngster. The youngster may react in a number of ways:

with anger at and resentment of parental sexuality;
by acting out sexually him/herself;
by dealing with the intensity of his/her own conflicting feelings by withdrawing or pushing away the adults;
by developing values and morals that differ greatly from the parent's wishes and teachings.

The new couple may be so preoccupied with their own love needs that they overlook important age-appropriate needs of the children. The child who overtly or covertly may protest this relative neglect may find the alternative ways to get his or her needs met, or may present with symptoms, or may scapegoat for the adults' dyadic problems.

Cultural, religious, socioeconomic factors

Divergent cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds are frequent in remarried families. Often the home household and the visited household are divergent too. How these differences are dealt with is an important consideration. If differences are respected both between households and within each household, a more favorable situation for the child will be established

Differences in households may be disproportionately overemphasized when one or both bioparent are not adequately emotionally divorced and use the child to strike out at one another. It is often difficult for divorced parents to accept that their child will not be raised as they would have raised the child themselves.

Financial differences

The degree to which stepsiblings experience financial inequality due to differences in resources of families of origin may adversely affect the child's adaptation to remarriage, especially if differences are very significant. This can promote the sense of competition, deprivation and isolation. For some children it produces a defensiveness about their less financially achieving bioparent, for others a negative sense of worth of themselves and their bioparent.

The remarried family suprasystem

Grandparents and extended family such as aunts and uncles can play a highly significant part in the adaptation of the child to remarriage, especially if they were deeply involved with the child during the double single parent stage. Their approval may be needed for the child to feel free to form new attachments. Unfortunately, parts of the suprasystem may hang on to the child and or interpret the remarriage as a disloyalty to the "old" family or to a deceased parent. The community is also influential, to the extend that remarried family is or is not common and blends in with the environment. Many school programs now include class discussions about divorce and remarriage with students being free to exchange their feelings and experiences.

Change of Residence, School, Peer Group

The integration of the child into remarried family is more difficult if he or she is uprooted and moved to a new community and new school, and, therefore, needs to make new friends. It is preferable, although not always

possible, if something in the child's outside life can remain continuous rather than subjecting him or her to total upheaval.

The experience of remaried family from a child's perspective

Positive potential

There are many positive aspects of multiplicity of remarried family for the child. After seeing a destructive marital relationship between his or hers bioparents, the child may gain positive models and a feeling of stability from the loving interaction of the remarried couple. The child may get care and attention from his or her stepparent, siblings, as well as grandparents that add to the bounty from bioparents. The multiplicity of personalities, styles of living, and values may give the child the rich tapestry of life in an extended family without its structural certitude and monolithicity. A stepparent offers the child opportunities for selective identification and may compensate for limitations in the bioparents. A child whose mother is a stern, distant person may look to the warmth and gentleness of his or her stepmother as away of getting some other needs gratified. The child's father may love him but have a limited education, and the child may find intellectual stimulation in a brighter or more educated stepfather. The child's breath of choices of a future mate is broadened in so far as he or she is influenced by parental introjects and projections

Multiplicity of Relationships

In order to understand better how the child experiences remarried families, it is important to be aware of the multidimensional system of interaction. The young child, still dealing with challenges of developmental tasks, has to use some of his or hers resources to understand and relate to the remarried family suprasystem where the number of members has increased and the rules have become increasingly unclear. There is a likelihood, that whatever the child does or does not do will reverberate in at least two households. When a child asks for help with his or her homework from the stepfather, there are implications for the biofather living someplace else, and for the stepsiblings who see their stepbrother take their father's time from them. A holiday or a birthday is not just a day to be enjoyed anymore, but a time of tension to make sure everyone in the family is satisfied and no parent and stepparent feels slighted by where and how the child chooses to spend the time.

If the remarried household is a destructive one, the child may be able to leave the unhealthy environment and spend some time in the household of the other bioparent. However, if the child needs to shift back and forth between households very often , the whole experience may not be very pleasant or healthy. The rules and roles in each household may be quite different requiring child to have to adjust at each reentry. As the child becomes older and more experienced with the whole pattern, reentry and separation usually becomes much easier to manage. The entire process is much easier when the adults do not stimulate the child's loyalty conflicts and do not use the child to feed their own conflicts.

Divided loyalties

If the households of the ex-spouses are hostile, the child may be used as a mediator between them. Divided loyalties between the child's feelings for the two bioparents and between the bioparents and the stepparents are common. The child often may feels that he or she has to choose between parents. The child may experience divided loyalties between his natural siblings and stepsiblings, particularly where a stepsibling is close in age and becomes a buddy to the child, thereby usurping the exclusive role the biosibling may have had.

Divide loyalties can extend to grandparents and other parts of the suprasystem. A child may like his or her new acquired stepgrandparents, but may feel the resentment of this by the biograndparents.

Pseudo-independence

The pseudo-independence stance of a child will often have originated during the double single parent stage when the child was left to his or her own devices in the midst of post-divorce chaos. This stance is the direct result of the loss of child's "holding environment." This pseudo-independence may become reinforced or heightened by the remarriage.

Often the child will repress hostility he or she feels toward bioparent for fear of another abandonment and will project the hostility onto the stepparent. If even this expression of conflict is too dangerous, the child may withdraw into a depression that may be intensified by unresolved mourning. A parent who has also repressed mourning may feel threatened by the child's grief and may tend to cut it off. The child may withdraw even further into depression to the point of suicidal ideation, or act out in rebelliousness and antisocial behavior creating numerous problems for the family.

Incest fears

The incidence of household incest between stepparents and child and among stepsiblings is higher than among their biological counterparts. The weakened incest taboos in the remarried family may prevent the child from reaching out to the stepparent for normal parenting. The remarried couple is at the start of a new marriage and sexuality pervades the household. A child's attachment to a stepparent is not as safe as that to a bioparent. For a mother to watch her five year old daughter flirt with her daddy can be a threatening experience. But if "daddy" is a stepfather, all three family members may experience anxiety, which may be defended against by withdrawal and distancing that is often maintained by constant series of acts of anger.

Clinical concerns

When working with children of remarried families, it is important for the clinician to fully understand the suprasystem and its subsystems. Even though the treatment process may involve one or more subsystems of the remarried family suprasystem, it is important to keep in mind how the treated part fits into the entirety of interrelated persons. For the child, the bioparent living someplace else must often be our concern on equal terms with the new adult couple and all the children.

The general approach used in assessment and treatment in remarried families is not the focus of this article. However, I would like to underscore the importance of trying to have all members of the child's two households and any other significant members of the remarried family suprasystem attend the first session. Most often, this would include all bio- and stepparents, bio and stepsiblings, as well as grandparents.

It is most important to emphasize that it is the parenting and step parenting issues which are the usually on the adults' treatment agenda. It is going to be up to the therapist to maintain the limits of the agenda during the sessions. Whom to include in treatment, as well as when to include them, and how to set up the sessions will depend on therapist clinical and professional judgment. Conceptualizing the suprafamily system and the dynamics of its parts makes it easier to make these determinations. Therapist objective is always to produce positive outcome as effectively and rapidly as possible. Understanding the suprafamily system and including appropriate subsystems in the treatment minimizes the sources of resistance to change and maximizes the potential for satisfactory outcome.

It is of great importance for the therapist to be flexible. For example, it might be necessary to see each bioparent separately to facilitate trust in the therapist or to promote comfort later on in joint sessions. At times, the clinician may have to enlist another therapist to work with another part of the suprasystem. A noncustodial parent, after a bitter divorce and custody fight, may feel that the remarried family's therapist must be allied with the former spouse. To be included in the treatment, a noncustodial parent may need his or her own therapist to act as a support in conjoint sessions. Quiet often, for a brief period of time different therapist may be assigned for the

child or children, the remarried couple, and the former spouse. They may meet separately with the assigned subsystem, as well as in the entire suprafamily session. When additional therapists are not available, one therapist can meet separately with different subsystems as long as needed.

Clinicians working with remarried families must keep in mind the special remarried issues, as well as emotional and interactional issues, which are universal rather than unique to remarried families. They should involve the family in clear contracting and goal setting and be able to assign tasks as indicated to facilitate attainment of treatment goals. In addition, they should be able to intervene at different levels of understanding: systemic, life cycle, and intrapsychic.

It is often helpful to employ a multimodal techniques in the sense that the therapist can include individual, couple, and conjoint family therapy in various combinations when needed.

Different issues and techniques may be necessary for variations in remarried families. There are some common remarried issues which are often addressed in treatment as they have direct impact on the child's everyday functioning. They are reported to be unresolved mourning, the special use of history, clarification of expectations of roles and relationships for the child as well as all adults. I will discuss each issue briefly

Unresolved mourning

Unresolved mourning by any of the family members can be a major block to the consolidation of the remarried family. Mourning is usually referred to as failing to grieve for the absent or dead parent, for the loss of the "old family" and the way of life. The therapist may find the expression of this in the child's inability to adjust to a new school or neighborhood, in longing for the former residence, or through more indirect expression such as complaints about food, not being able to sleep, not liking new friends, and so forth. The therapist may need to involve the whole family in a mourning process, or it may be more relevant to break the family into bio-units, so that child is seen separately with each of the biological parents and siblings.

Use of Family History

A primary difference in remarried family therapy as compared to the intact family is the use and meaning of the history. Many family therapists approach work with the intact families with not putting too much emphasis on history, but concentrating on here-and-now interactions. However, when working with remarried families, emphasis on the history is vital so that family members can learn to appreciate and respect one another. The therapist may then use this material to make connections for the family in terms of similarities and differences. The therapist can highlight the variety of feelings, attitudes, values, and behavior to illustrate that differences are not only there, but are to be expected and accepted. Paradoxically, stressing the differences rather than pushing for harmony can facilitate the integrational process for remarried families in a more genuine way.

The child's "behavioral contract"

Just as the marital contract is used with adults to clarify couple issues, the children's contract can be used with somewhat older children to clarify what the child expects to receive and give in relating to the adults and other children in the remarried family. The "contract" can tap into expectations and attitudes, which the child was not aware of or could not verbalize. It can be used as an instrument that outlines several frequent concerns for children in remarried families and can include special issues that the child wants to add. Then, the child can discuss his ideas, hopes, fears, and hopefully reach some agreement on each outlined point such as describe the way you would like mother or father who you live with to act, or describe the kind of stepparent you would like to have, and so forth. The contract can be written by the child, or for some, it would be better to just be talked through at home, or with the family during the sessions, or just alone with the therapist.

Problem areas

Therapists' personal reactions when working with remarried families are of great importance. When there has been desertion by a

bioparent, hostility on the part of a stepparent, neglect, overprotection or indulgence on the part of a bioparent, it is not uncommon for the therapist to want to rescue the child from the situation. However, hostility towards the "offending" adult has to be controlled.

It is important for the therapist to be cognizant of the need for children in remarried families to preserve the positive parts of their images of both bioparents. Children are often defensive of their parental images and attack on a parent is an attack on them. The therapist has to counter the parental tendency to polarize the child's feelings so that one parent is all good, the other parent and or stepparent all bad. This type of splitting often produces devastating results in the child's sense of self and of his parents. The therapist may unconsciously to allay with the child against the "bad" parent or by competing with the parent for the child's affection. If the family denies their conflict and focuses their trouble on the child, the therapist may sense that certain material is forbidden, join the family denial, and put treatment focus on the child.

Therapists who are stepparents themselves may over –identify with stepparents, especially when a child is especially hostile and rejecting of the stepparents' efforts to reach the child.

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Svetislava Đuknić

RAZVOD I PONOVNI BRAK: PRILAGOĐAVANJE DECE

Apstrakt

Deca čiji su roditelji stupili u novi brak su deca koja su doživela separaciju i razvod svojih roditelja ili smrt jednog od roditelja. Takvi događaji su značajni na bilo kom razvojnom nivou. Za neku decu novi brak jednog od roditelja može biti sasvim prihvatljiv, tokom vremena i uz podršku odraslih, ona mogu naći adekvatno mesto u toj novoj porodici. Međutim, reakcija neke dece može biti veoma negativna. U radu je diskusija fokusirana uglavnom na decu mlađu od dvanaest godina. Dat je kratak prikaz relevantne literature o uticaju tog potencijalno stresogenog događaja na razvoj i prilagođavanje deteta. Takođe se razmatraju specifični problemi dece u ponovnim brakovima njihovih roditelja kao i načini adekvatnog prevazilaženja pojedinih teškoća.

***Ključne reči**: razvod, ponovni brak, prilagođavanje dece*

Appendix a

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO DIVORCE

Divorce is a time of great fear and emotional upheaval for children, and it creates long lasting effects, some of which may not surface until years later after the actual divorce. Young adults whose parents divorced earlier may have difficulty in establishing relationships, feel confused about career plans, and so for.

AGE: O – 2 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Aware of loss of parent
Problems: Regression; Developmental delays; withdrawal; increased stranger anxiety
Prevention: Maintain routines; support caregiver; supply supplemental caregiver(s)
Custody/
Visitation: Frequent, short visits with noncustodial parent

AGE: 2 – 3 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Fears of abandonment; misses absent parent
Problems: Regression; developmental delays; withdrawal; increased stranger anxiety;
toileting and sleeping problems; sex role confusion
Prevention: Maintain routines and discipline; provide simple explanations to child
Custody/
Visitation: Overnight visits with noncustodial parent

AGE: 3 – 5 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Fears of abandonment; misses absent parent; feels unloved
Problems: Regression; developmental delays; withdrawal; increased stranger anxiety;
toileting and sleeping problems; sex role confusion; clinging, whining or

"perfect " behavior; sadness

Prevention: Maintain routines and discipline; provide simple explanation to child;

assure that child did not cause divorce

Custody/

Visitation: Overnight or longer visits, but not more than ten days apart

AGE: 6 – 8 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Fears of abandonment; misses absent parent; feels unloved; fear for future;

Feels guilty; feels betrayed

Problems: Anger; behavioral and academic problems; withdrawal; depression;

dependency

Prevention: Maintain routines and discipline; provide simple explanation to child;

assure that child did not cause divorce; keep child out of parents' conflict;

keep as consistent an environment as possible

Custody/

Visitation: Longer visits; contact during week; some flexibility around child's school/

Social activities; involvement of noncustodial parent in child's care

AGE: 9 – 12 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Fears of abandonment; misses absent parent; feels unloved; fear for future;

Feels guilty; feels betrayed; may feel rejected; needs someone to blame

Problems: Worries about custody; hostile towards one or both parents;

Academic and behavioral problems; may be "parentified"

Prevention: Maintain adult supports for parents; maintain/improve parenting
skills; help child process anger

Custody/
Visitation: May need to decrease frequency of visits; regular flexible visits;
Involvement in school activities

AGE: 12 – 18 YEARS OLD

Reaction: Feels grief for loss of family life; fears about own future;
feels responsible for family members; feels angry

Problems: Withdrawn from family or clinging; decreased self-esteem;
Academic/behavioral problems; concern about relationships with
Opposite sex; difficulty with career plans

Prevention: Maintain discipline; keep low profile of parental sexual activities;
Help child cope with ambivalent feelings; support career goals

Custody/
Visitation: Flexible visitation schedule; possible trial living with noncustodial parent

Sources: Bray, J H (1991); Wallerstein, J and Blakeslee, S (1990); Wallerstein, J and Kelly, J B (1980)

Appendix B

Summary of Issues Facing Children and Adults **in Remarried Families**

There is a clear need to provide information and education to remarried families as they negotiate challenges during initial integrational processes. This brief summary of issues facing children and adults in remarried families can provide a basis when planning and implementing educational interventions for stepfamily members.

Family Dynamics

Children
Stepfamily systems are less close (Ganong & Coleman)
Biological parent-child bond predates spousal bond (Ganong & Coleman)
Many types relationships ((Ganong & Coleman)
Competition for time (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Extended kinship Network (Walsh)
Sexual conflicts (Walsh)

Adults
Stepfamily systems are less close (Ganong & Coleman)
Biological parent-child bond predates spousal bond (Ganong & Coleman)
Many types of relationships ((Ganong & Coleman)
Competition for time ((Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Extended kinship network (Walsh)
Sexual conflicts (Walsh)

Parent-Child Relationships

Children
Name for the new parent (Walsh)
Discipline by the stepparent (Walsh)

Adults
Discipline of children (Walsh)
Build Bio – Step parental coalition (Pasley et al.)

Marital Relationship

Children

Adults
Effects of parenting on the new marital relationship (Pasley et al.; Walsh)
Strengthen marital relationship ((Ganong & Coleman; Pasley et al,)

Non Residential Parent Relationship

Children
Idealized absent parent ((Ganong & Coleman)

Adults
Sharing responsibility across households (Ganong & Coleman)
Managing continuing adult conflict (Walsh)
Competition of the nonresidential parent (Walsh)
Reduce loyalty conflicts (Pasley et al)
Reduce triangulation of children (Pasley et al)

Sibling Relationships

Children
Sibling Conflict

Adults

Transitional Adjustments
Children
No shared rules/rituals (Ganong & Coleman)
Instant love of new family members (Walsh)
Fantasy about old family structure (Walsh)
Changes over time (Walsh)
Exit and entry of children (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Increase family flexibility early on remarriage (Ganong & Coleman)
Life cycle incongruencies (Ganong & Coleman)

Adults
No shared rules/rituals (Ganong & Coleman)
Instant love of new family members (Walsh)
Fantasy about old family structure (Walsh)
Changes over time (Walsh)
Exit and entry of children (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Increase family flexibility early on remarriage (Ganong & Coleman)
Life cycle incongruencies (Ganong & Coleman)

Incomplete Institution

Children
Confusion over family roles & boundaries (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Society's concept of the remarried family (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Interference with stepfamily functioning (Ganong & Coleman)
Less support by friends/family (Ganong & Coleman)
Lack of legal ties (Ganong & Coleman)

Adults
Confusion over family roles & boundaries (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Society's concept of the remarried family (Ganong & Coleman; Walsh)
Interference with stepfamily functioning (Ganong & Coleman)

Less support by friends/family (Ganong & Coleman)
Lack of legal ties (Ganong & Coleman)
Financial concerns (Ganong & Coleman)
Explore adaptable roles (Ganong & Coleman)

Emotional Responses

Children
Affection for the new parent (Walsh)
Loss of the biological parent (Ganong & Coleman; Pasley et al.; Walsh)
Instant love of new family members ((Walsh)
Share family histories (Pasley et al)
Adults
Instant love of new family members (Walsh)
Resolve grief over losses & changes in family relationships (Ganong & Coleman)

Stepfamily Expectations

Children
Clarifying unrealistic expectations about family/parents/stepparents (Ganong & Coleman)
Use of intact family unit as a model (Ganong & Coleman)
Developing familial self concept (Walsh)
Developing individual self concept (Walsh)
Normalize the emotional, social, and economic realities of remarriage (Pasley et al.)

Adults
Clarifying unrealistic expectations about family/parents/stepparents (Ganong & Coleman)
Use of intact family unit as a model (Ganong & Coleman)
Developing familial self concept (Walsh)
Developing individual self concept (Walsh)
Normalize the emotional, social, and economic realities of remarriage (Pasley et al.)