



## Children of Divorce Intervention Program

A procedures manual for conducting support groups  
**KINDERGARTEN & FIRST GRADE CHILDREN**

JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, Ph.D. • Linda Alpert-Gillis, Ph.D.

*“This group has been a safe place where I could talk about things I’ve never told anyone before...It’s helped me to see that divorce is sad, but it’s not the end of the world for me or my family...”*

—PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

children’s  
institute

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND  
EMOTIONAL HEALTH

# Children of Divorce Intervention Program

A procedures manual for conducting support groups  
KINDERGARTEN & FIRST GRADE CHILDREN

---

JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, Ph.D. • Linda Alpert-Gillis, Ph.D.

children's  
institute



STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND  
EMOTIONAL HEALTH

274 N. Goodman Street, Suite D103  
Rochester, New York 14607  
(585) 295-1000 (phone)  
(585) 295-1090 (fax)  
(877) 888-7647 (toll free)  
[www.childrensinstitute.net](http://www.childrensinstitute.net)

Copyright ©1997. THIRD EDITION. CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Curriculum Overview</b>	5
<b>Program Implementation</b>	9
<b>Part I: Establishing the Group and Learning About Feelings</b>	
Session 1: Getting to Know Each Other	17
Session 2: All Kinds of Feelings	23
Session 3: How I Feel	33
<b>Part II: Family Changes</b>	
Session 4: My Family	39
Session 5: Divorce is a Grown-Up Problem	43
Session 6: Understanding Family Changes	49
<b>Part III: Developing Coping Skills</b>	
Session 7: Introducing Social Problem-Solving	55
Session 8: Developing Problem-Solving Skills With Puppets	63
Session 9: Solvable Problems vs. Unsolvable Problems	69
<b>Part IV: Enhancing Self-Esteem and Maintaining Support</b>	
Session 10: Consolidating Skills: The Kids Are Special People Game	77
Session 11: I Am Special	81
Session 12: Saying Good-Bye	85
<b>Bibliography</b>	91
<b>References</b>	93

# Introduction

Based on extensive evidence indicating that parental separation is a difficult and painful experience for children, the Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP) was developed to help youngsters cope more effectively with this highly stressful life event. CODIP is a group-based, preventive program designed to help children deal with the special problems precipitated by parental divorce. The overarching goal is to prevent or ameliorate the academic, behavioral and emotional problems that often accompany such a stressful family disruption and to enhance children's long term adjustment.

The program's two main goals are to:

- 1. Reduce the stress of parental divorce by providing a supportive group environment.**
- 2. Build competence by teaching specific skills that can help children cope with the many challenges posed by parental divorce.**

This program is based on a preventive intervention model. It is not intended for children with severe, chronic, emotional difficulties that warrant more intensive treatment.

Four CODIP programs have been developed to date, one for older latency children (grades 4-6), one for early latency children (grades 2 and 3), this one for kindergarten and 1st grade youngsters and one for early adolescents (grades 7 and 8). Although the goals and objectives embedded in these interventions for children of divorce remain relatively constant, the specific topics and techniques vary according to the developmental differences of the age groups.

This curriculum was designed to address psychological reactions specific to the developmental level of 5- and 6-year-olds. Children of divorce, at this age, often react to the changes instigated by marital disruption with fear, bewilderment, sadness and, often, guilt. Regression is also a common response in this age group. Overwhelmed by their anxiety, some children lapse into behaviors that they had once outgrown, such as thumb-sucking, baby talk or separation difficulties.

Developmentally relevant aspects of Wallerstein's (1983) concept of psychological tasks facing children of divorce are also reflected in the curriculum. Specifically, the six hierarchical, divorce-related coping tasks identified are:

- 1. Acknowledging the reality of the divorce and achieving a realistic cognitive understanding of it.**
- 2. Disengaging from parental conflict and resuming the child's agenda.**
- 3. Resolving the many losses that divorce imposes.**
- 4. Resolving problems of anger and self-blame.**
- 5. Accepting the permanence of divorce.**
- 6. Achieving realistic hope about one's future relationships.**

Mastering these sequenced tasks, starting at the time of separation and continuing through late adolescence, enables the child to integrate the experience of parental divorce and to develop the capacity to trust and love in the future. To that end, the program emphasizes the importance of developing a supportive group environment in which these tasks are reflected in the intervention goals.

The program has four primary parts:

- 1. Establishing the group and learning about feelings.**
- 2. Understanding family changes.**
- 3. Developing coping skills.**
- 4. Enhancing self-esteem and maintaining support.**

Although CODIP uses a variety of techniques, it is important to keep in mind that any single technique or approach is but one aspect of a more comprehensive effort to realize the larger goals of helping children express and understand their feelings and resolve personal problems. And beyond those objectives lies the program's ultimate and most important goal: to enhance children's long-term adjustment.

This curriculum is intended as a guide for conducting a preventive intervention program, not group psychotherapy. Carefully controlled research has been conducted, providing an evidence base of CODIP's effectiveness. Results of those studies have shown significant improvements in children's home and school adjustment from the perspectives of parents, teachers, group leaders and the children themselves (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1989; Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1987; Pedro-Carroll & Cowen, 1985, 1987; Pedro-Carroll, Cowen, Hightower & Guare, 1986; Sterling, 1986; Pedro-Carroll, Alpert-Gillis & Cowen, 1992; Pedro-Carroll & Alpert-Gillis, 1997). A follow-up study found that the improvements in adjustment experienced by children in the program were still in evidence two years later (Pedro-Carroll, Sutton & Wyman, 1999). In 1991, CODIP was the recipient of the National Mental Health Association's Lela Rowland Award for Exemplary Prevention Programs in the United States. In 2005, CODIP received the Program Excellence Award from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Based on converging evidence of the efficacy of this intervention, CODIP has been widely disseminated to others working with children of divorce.