

**Play Therapy with Children from Separated and Divorced Families**

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**Objectives**

- Participants will understand the impact that separation and divorce can have on children.
- Participants will learn new play therapy interventions for working with children from separated and divorced families, including art, music and bibliotherapy.

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**Typical Reactions of Children: Infants and Toddlers**

- Respond strongly to emotions, conflict and changes around them
  - Sleeping difficulties
  - Clinginess
  - Feelings of insecurity
- Notice when one parent no longer lives there

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Infants and Toddlers: What They Need**

- A calm environment
- Reassurance that the parent is coming back soon
- Ease into changes such as a new daycare provider
- Consistency in their schedules
- Keeping favorite toys, blankets close by
- Reassurance of parents' love

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Typical Reactions of Children: Preschoolers**

- Regression
  - Toilet training
  - Thumbsucking
  - Tantrums
- May have difficulty separating from parents
- Anger and aggression toward parents
- Sleeping issues, possibly nightmares

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Preschoolers: What They Need**

- Time to transition
- Consistent schedules and reminders of who they are seeing when
- Reassurance of parents' love

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Typical Reactions of Children:  
Elementary Children**

- Begin to understand what divorce/separation really means
- May blame themselves
- Worry about changes in their lives
- May attempt to get parents back together

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Elementary Children:  
What They Need**

- Remind them they are not to blame
- Talk with children about their thoughts and feelings
- Reassurance of parents' love

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Preteens and Adolescents:  
What They Need**

- Open communication with parents (still age appropriate)
- Parents being involved in child's life
- Honor family rituals and routines
- Age appropriate chores
- Reassurance of parents' love
- Avoid using teenagers as confidants!

Leon & Cole, 2010

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**Directive Play Therapy Interventions**

- Music Interventions
- Bibliotherapy
- Art Interventions

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**Music Intervention: What the Music Means to Me**

- **Goals:**
  - Normalize family situation
  - Elicit thoughts/feelings about family experience
  - Share thoughts/feelings through expressive modalities
- **Materials:**
  - Video to watch or song to listen to
  - Copy of lyrics and highlighter or pen
  - Art or journal materials

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**Music Intervention: What the Music Means to Me**

- **Recommended Songs:**
  - Family Portrait by Pink
  - Wonderful by Everclear
  - Stay Together for the Kids by Blink 182
  - Love Triangle by RaeLynn
  - Highway 20 Ride by Zach Brown Band

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**Music Interventions: My Divorce CD**

- **Goal:** Help the client express feelings about themselves and their feeling situation.
- **Materials:** CD holder, markers and other drawing materials, magazines, scissors and glue if desired.

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**Art interventions: Past/Present/Future**

- **Goals:**
  - Elicit thoughts/feelings about family experience
  - Help with future thinking about family situation
  - Share thoughts/feelings through expressive modalities
- **Materials:**
  - 11x14 paper
  - Markers/crayons/colored pencils

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**Art interventions: Transition Suitcase**

- **Goals:**
  - Help child cope with transition between houses
- **Materials:**
  - File folder suitcase
  - Markers/crayons

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**Art interventions: My new world**

- **Goals:**
  - Provide a visual of the child's world for them to process
  - Process the changes that have happened in their world.
- **Materials:**
  - 11x14 paper
  - Markers/crayons
  - Transportation Stickers

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**Resources**

- Corey helps kids cope with divorce: Playful Therapeutic Activities for Young Children by Liana Lowenstein
- Sesame Street Divorce Toolkit [www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/divorce](http://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/divorce)
  - Two-Hug Day book
- Creative Interventions for Children of Divorce by Liana Lowenstein

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**Bibliotherapy**

- Bouncing back website for free books for kids from divorced families <http://bborderpage.blogspot.com/>

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**Bibliotherapy for Preschoolers**

- Two Homes by Claire Masurel
- Mama and Daddy Bear's Divorce by Cornelia Maude Spelman
- Standing on My Own Two Feet by Tamara Schmitz
- The Family Book by Todd Parr
- The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

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**Bibliotherapy: The Kissing Hand**

- Play Therapy Intervention – Kissing Hand
- Goals:
  - Discuss how the client copes when they miss mom/dad
  - Remind them the person they miss is always with them
- Goals:
  - Paper
  - Markers
  - Paper heart and glue/tape

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**Bibliotherapy for Elementary School Children**

- My Family's Changing by Pat Thomas
- I Don't Want to Talk About It by Jeanie Ransom
- When My Parents Forgot How to Be Friends by Jennifer Moore-Mallinos
- The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

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### Bibliotherapy: Invisible String

- Play Therapy Intervention – Invisible String
- Goals:
  - Discuss how the client copes when they miss mom/dad
  - Remind them the person they miss is always with them
- Goals:
  - Paper
  - Red markers or hearts cut out
  - Glue or scotch tape
  - Drawing utensil

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### Wonderful Resource!

- University of Missouri-Extension handouts: search for “Divorce”

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### Reference

- Leon, K. & Cole, K. (2010). *Helping children understand divorce*. Retrieved from <http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/hesguide/humanrel/gh6600.pdf>

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