

**THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL WHEN A FAMILY DISSOLVES:  
PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND  
SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS**

by

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## Abstract

This doctoral study investigated the role of the school when a family dissolves as perceived by parents, educators, and social service professionals. Perceptions of the most effective supports and the most appropriate services a school can provide children experiencing parental divorce are reported for each of the three. The principal instrument used to gather data was a 15-item questionnaire developed by the researcher. Data analysis of survey items was completed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Follow-up interviews were conducted with two members of each survey respondent group to obtain more in-depth responses to the survey questions.

All respondent groups agreed that there is a role for the school when a family dissolves as a result of parental divorce. All respondents agreed that individual counseling and regular meetings with the school counselor are very effective supports and are very appropriate services for schools to offer children. Respondents also agreed that the teacher plays an important role in providing effective support and appropriate services to children experiencing parental divorce and that peer counseling was an effective support and an appropriate service for these children. Clearly, support for schools to assume a role in the event of family dissolution exists among the three groups, although there are differences in the effectiveness and appropriateness assigned to certain strategies by the various groups. Better communication and collaboration among the groups would enhance the provision of effective supports and appropriate services in schools to children experiencing parental divorce.

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## CHAPTER I

### The Problem

#### Introduction

American children are greatly affected by the revolutionary changes in patterns of marriage and divorce occurring over the past thirty years. Appel (1985) contends that a divorce often forces a child to cope with lower family income, distracted and absent parents, step-parents, and step-siblings, therefore changing the way in which the child might behave in the school setting. It is projected that nearly half of all children born today will spend some time in a one-parent family as a result of divorce (Shiono & Quinn, 1994). Although more than fifteen million school-age children were affected by divorce twenty years ago (Hammond, 1979), few studies have measured the academic performance and emotional stability of children who have experienced divorce (Reynolds, 1996; Tors, 1995; Lewis, 1991).

Census data show that in 1990, the number of divorcing couples in the United States was 1,182,000, the highest recorded number since 1985 (Clarke, 1995). The most recent census data show that the number of children involved in divorce was 1,075,000 in 1990. According to Clarke, the number of children involved in divorce varied between 1 and 1.2 million during the years 1972-1990, while the number of divorces increased to levels that equaled and then exceeded the 1.2 million. The rate of children involved in divorce per 1000 children under that age of 18 was 16.8 in 1990, representing an appreciable number of children who in any given year are in the midst of a family formally dissolving. Recognizing that this many children are affected annually and that the formal dissolution of their families actually has effects that last well beyond the year

when a divorce actually occurs, a substantial proportion of children in today's elementary and secondary schools are very likely to be dealing with the effects of divorce (Stuart & Abt, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This study investigates the role of the school in meeting the needs of children experiencing parental divorce.

Stuart and Abt (1981), two adolescent and family therapists, feel that a child's school should play an important role when a child experiences parental separation and divorce. In a literature search of more than 900 journals and books, however, they found very little information written about the role of the school in parental separation and divorce. According to Stuart and Abt (1981), schools are not often able to make a sufficient social contribution toward ameliorating the effects of divorce observed in schools such as declining grades, a change in attendance patterns, and even depression. The schools are often constants in a time when a child's life dramatically changes as a result of parental divorce; a place from which information about children experiencing divorce can be obtained. Parents of these children and social service professionals who work with school-age children of divorce are other resources for obtaining information.

Research on children experiencing parental divorce is needed to provide schools with current and appropriate information about the needs of these children. Ideally such research could draw on the perspectives of those working to meet the needs of children both inside and outside of the classroom. Schools are currently attempting to meet the needs of children experiencing parental divorce based on limited information regarding children's responses and needs reported in research and on administrators' personal perceptions of what the school's response should be to a child experiencing divorce

(Reynolds, 1996). The survey and interview data obtained from this dissertation will add to and will strengthen the research available to schools.

Through a series of interviews, Kelly and Wallerstein (1980), two prominent researchers in the area of the effects of divorce on children, found that teachers' perceptions revealed that two-thirds of school age children show changes in their school behavior following parental separation. The most common problems identified through Kelly and Wallerstein's interviews are lowered academic achievement, anxiety as seen in restless behavior, concentration difficulties, increase in daydreaming, sadness, and depression in younger children (Kelly & Wallerstein, 1980; Stuart & Abt, 1981).

When a child experiences the disruption and trauma of parental divorce, the child's school should play a positive and supportive role (Frieman, 1997; Graver & Morse, 1986; Marburger, 1987; Stuart & Abt, 1981). However, there is significant disagreement in the literature about what the role of the school might be. According to Appel (1985), schools must deal with changes in students' family situations because such changes often influence a child's behavior in school. Levy and Copple (1986) feel that there are some social responsibilities that schools must assume under certain circumstances. They conclude that schools must cooperate with social and welfare services to compensate for the disadvantage created by troubled homes and troubled communities.

Sediak and Schlossman (1985) feel that schools have been resistant to the progressive, turn-of-the-century reformers who wanted schools to be all-purpose social-service institutions. In fact, very few schools have embraced progressivist views on

educational reform. They suggest that out of the progressivist movement only organized recreation and competitive sports have been adopted by schools.

Opposing the progressivist prospective, Boschee (1989) takes issue with those who use public schools “as a catchall for problem social issues” (p. 78). He states that the public schools in the United States have continued to offer quality programs despite declining federal support for education. Boschee feels that in order to develop a strong society and competitive economy in the United States, quality basic education must be provided to all children. Williams (1987) feels that there should be limits set on what society asks schools to accomplish and that schools have too often accepted charges for which they have neither the expertise or material resources to accomplish.

There is little empirical basis both for determining what services schools currently provide children experiencing divorce and about what would be most appropriate for schools to provide at this time in a child’s life. Schools, responsible for the education of children, some of whom are experiencing parental divorce, need more information about the responses and needs of children from those most knowledgeable. Parents, school officials, and social service professionals, are primary sources of information about children experiencing divorce.

This study will provide insights from these three primary groups about what services and support they think a schools currently provide as well as what services and support they could and should provide to best help children through the period of parental separation and divorce. This study will provide answers to the question, “What is the role of the school when a family dissolves?”

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge that schools can use to determine how to best serve children experiencing parental divorce. The most recent census data indicate that the divorce rate in the United States continues to increase (Clarke, 1995), and that schools are a constant in the lives of elementary school age children providing structure and routine to their daily lives (Clarke, 1995; Frieman, 1994; Graver & Morse, 1986; Wallerstein, 1977). The study provides information to enhance the knowledge of those working with children in schools to provide both effective and appropriate interventions particularly for elementary school age children experiencing parental divorce. Schools are not always prepared and/or equipped to adequately work with children of divorce, and decisions about the most effective and appropriate interventions do not always reflect the opinions of the groups either most knowledgeable or most directly affected by divorce — parents, educators, and social service professionals. The information gained by this study provides school personnel with knowledge useful in making sound decisions in developing organizational policies and appropriate programs or strategies for working with these children.

### Research Questions

The following research question will guide this study: What role should the school play, if any, in providing support or services to children experiencing parental divorce? The study explores the perspectives of various groups including parents, educators, and social service professionals. Sub-questions to be addressed include:

1. To what extent does a divorce impact a child's behavior and/or achievement in school?

2. What supports or services, if any, do schools currently provide children experiencing parental divorce?
3. What supports and services would represent the most appropriate response of a school interested in meeting the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce?
4. What supports or services would be most effective in meeting the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce?

### Methods

A survey (see Appendix B) was administered to a population of divorced parents of children who have experienced divorce, educators, and social service professionals. The respondents represented all teachers in one K-6 elementary school in a small Northern Ohio school district of 3,400 students, a group of the public and private social service professionals serving children and families enrolled at this school site, as well as the parents of students in grades four through six, who have been divorced for at least one year, but not more than seven years. To clarify and gain a more in-depth perspective to survey responses, follow-up interviews were conducted with two members of each survey respondent group selected at random based on their personal experience with divorce.

The questionnaire used in this study was reviewed and critiqued by the chair of the dissertation committee, as well as by other members of the dissertation committee with expertise in survey research methodology to assure its reliability and validity for use in this study. The questionnaire was piloted with several individuals from each group of potential survey respondents to determine its content validity for use in this study. The questions regarding potential supports and strategies to aid children experiencing divorce

were drawn from the literature on children of divorce and were refined based on pilot administrations of the survey. Efforts were made through piloting of the survey with educators and social service professionals to determine the clarity and relevancy of each questionnaire item.

Each respondent group was asked to complete a Lickert scale questionnaire in addition to answering several open-ended questions. Closed-ended survey questions asked about 1) the types of services that are currently available for children experiencing parental divorce at the elementary school level; 2) the strategies which may be most effective in working with children of divorce; and 3) the strategies which may be most appropriate for a school as contrasted to non-school agencies to provide. Responses were analyzed within and across groups to identify areas of inter-role agreement at statistically significant levels using ANOVA. Post hoc procedures as appropriate were conducted. Statistical significance was set at the  $p < .05$  level. Results are reported in both graphic and narrative forms.

### Significance of Study

Because little information is available on the role of a school in working with children experiencing parental separation and divorce and because few studies examine the role of the school in working with children experiencing divorce from the combined perspectives of educators, parents, and social service professionals, this study addresses a gap in the professional literature. The literature available indicates that it is unrealistic for some children to continue academically (i.e. with the same degree of concentration, attention span, interest level, and desire to learn) at a time when a family is experiencing divorce. The reluctance of school professionals to involve themselves with social

problems of the children has contributed to a dearth of literature, and conversely, the lack of information has helped create the limited and guarded school involvement (Stuart & Abt, 1981). A systematic examination of current school practices and alternative roles for schools to play in addressing student needs during the period of parental divorce will provide a useful basis for addressing this problem. The perspective of parents, social service professionals, and school officials are important in helping schools provide better and more appropriate supports and services to such children.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study may include the following:

1. The possibility that some of those surveyed do not return written surveys.
2. The respondent's lack of capacity to articulate what are emotional responses to many undefinable tensions.
3. The researcher is the principal of Geneva Elementary School.
4. The fact that the group of respondents involved in this study is limited in numbers.
5. The respondent's role in his/her experience with children of divorce.

Delimitations of this study may include the following:

1. The respondents are drawn from one community.
2. Only those willing to share their experiences with the interviewer in returning surveys and being interviewed are included in the study.
3. The respondents voluntarily participated in returning surveys and in subsequent interviews.



### Definition of Terms

Child experiencing parental divorce: A child whose parents have been divorced not less than one year but not more than seven years.

Educator: A current classroom teacher of children in any elementary school grades kindergarten through six.

Elementary school age child: A child in grades kindergarten through six.

Parent: A natural parent of a child who has experienced the divorce from his/her spouse.

Parent experiencing divorce: A natural parent of a child who has been divorced not less than one year.

Social service professional: A counselor, psychologist, case worker or therapist who has worked with children experiencing parental divorce.

### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, describes the purpose, methods, and significance of the study, as well as its limitations, delimitations, and definition of terms. Chapter Two presents a review of educational literature related to the research problem on the role of the school in working with elementary school-age children experiencing parental divorce.

Chapter Three describes the methodology employed for this study. It includes a description of the study design, instrumentation, data collection procedure, as well as the types of analysis applied in arriving at the findings. Chapter Four presents the results of the data collection and the data analysis. Chapter Five summarizes the study, presents

conclusions, recommendations, and avenues for further research. A Reference list and the Appendixes containing support materials for this study are found following Chapter Five.

### Summary

This study addresses the appropriate role of the school in working with elementary school-age children experiencing parental divorce. In a time when the divorce rate in the United States continues to rise, schools are becoming one of few constants in the lives of children. Since there is limited research on the perspectives of those closely working with children experiencing divorce, this study uses survey methodology and selected follow-up interviews to gather information from social service professionals, educators, and parents on the most effective and appropriate roles for schools to pursue to support and serve children experiencing parental divorce.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Related Literature

#### History and Background

In the past two decades, the divorce rate in the United States has increased by 250 percent, giving this nation the distinction of having the highest divorce rate in the world (Barr, 1986; Clarke, 1995; Spencer & Shapiro, 1993). It is reported that at least sixty percent of divorce cases involve children, and since 1972 nearly one million children each year see their parents divorce. Today it is estimated that one out of six children is a child of divorce. Children who experience divorce typically live in a single parent household (most likely the mother's) for a period of five years after the divorce (Parker & Zuckerman, 1995). Parker and Zuckerman (1995) report that divorced parents may, in fact, encounter additional family disruptions and the need to readjust more than once.

According to O'Rourke and Worzbyt (1996), every time a child experiences divorce, his/her life is forever changed. Divorce is compared to the death of a parent in terms of the stress it puts on children (O'Rourke & Worzbyt, 1996). Ackerman (1997) states that divorce for a child is second only to the distress experienced from the loss of a loved one through death. A study by Arnold and Carnahan, cited in O'Rourke and Worzbyt (1996), lists the following stressors which can be experienced by children of divorce: preceding marital strife, break-up of the home, the need to move, psychological demands of having two homes, lowered standard of living, loss of non-custodial parent, loss of father, change in frequency of grandparent contact, parental stress due to the divorce, custodial visitation battles, pressures to take sides, decreased parental availability, chronic after-shock, and remarriage.

Parker and Zuckerman (1995) state that divorce rarely represents one event but rather a series of events for a child. They name three stages of divorce noting that families proceed through them at relatively different rates. These stages of divorce include the following:

1. The acute phase: Involves increased parental conflict, separation, and the decision to divorce.
2. The transitional phase: Former spouses cease their relationship and develop separate lives.
3. The post-divorce phase: Each parent establishes a relatively stable, single-parent household or has remarried. (p. 359)

Children's responses to divorce vary widely and are related to their age, gender, and environmental factors (Parker & Zuckerman, 1995).

Shiono and Quinn (1994) state that when compared to children from intact two-parent families, children of divorced families appear to suffer more adjustment problems. It is not clear, according to this research, whether or not these problems of adjustment may have occurred prior to the divorce.

#### Divorce and A Child's Developmental Stages

Some studies indicate that the impact of divorce on children varies according to the developmental stage of the child during the time of marital dissolution (Jellinek & Slovik, 1981; Magrab, 1976; Pheffer, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980;). Magrab (1978) asserts that a developmental approach is essential to understand the impact of divorce on children.

Erikson (1985) divides human personality development into eight stages, each involving a conflict and a turning point. As each stage is positively resolved, the

personality is strengthened, and the individual is prepared to face the next developmental crisis. According to Erikson, the influences of parents are extremely important to children for the positive resolution of childhood developmental stages. When parental support for growth response is missing, children have difficulty completing the developmental stages defined by Erikson. Other supportive adults can help children move through developmental stages. This supports the idea that adults at school such as a teacher or counselor could be of help to a child whose parents are distracted by the process of divorce.

The Industry vs. Inferiority developmental conflict stage (Erikson, 1985) is experienced by elementary school children. The central issue of this developmental stage is the child's mastery of specific skills providing a sense of self-esteem. Cognitive ability is developing, and children begin to receive systematic instruction on the skills employed by adults in their culture. Children also begin to understand certain principles of relationships between things, objects, and events. Self-esteem is derived from accomplishments, and children begin both to feel useful and to develop a sense of pride in mastering tasks. At the end of this stage, children begin to understand acceptable behavior as defined by parents and society; however, they cannot be expected to have total control over unacceptable behavior. How well children see themselves developing these new skills depends on the attitudes and behaviors of their parents as well as other significant adults. Positive reinforcement and encouragement fosters children's feelings of mastery and allows them to strive for further development (Erikson, 1985).

According to Feldman (1986) parental influences are very important for positive resolution of childhood stages in Erikson's model. When parental support for growth

response is missing, children have a difficult time successfully completing developmental stages. Regardless of the family situation, developmental conflicts remain constant for children (Erikson, 1985). Feldman (1986) finds that children at the Industry vs. Inferiority developmental stage become more involved in peer groups and, through group membership, test the values and attitudes they have learned at home. Children at this stage internalize moral judgments and begin to rely less on their automatic obedience to parents. At the end of this developmental stage, children begin to understand acceptable behavior as defined by parents and society. According to Feldman (1986), how well children perceive themselves as developing skills at this level depends greatly on the behavior and attitudes of their parents. If the children's attempts to master new tasks is met with ridicule and rejection or is ignored, they are at risk of developing feelings of inferiority and inadequacy with respect to their abilities. The positive reinforcement and encouragement which foster children's feelings of mastery and allows them to strive for further development may be absent or overlooked by parents experiencing divorce.

Barr (1986) reports that pre-adolescent school-age children are developing in ways that significantly influence their response to divorce. Around the age of nine, children begin to develop more mature coping skills, giving them the ability to interpret divorce as something solely between their parents for which they have no responsibility. Thus, the pre-adolescent child is in the first age-group capable of feeling relief at parental divorce and is able to point out ways in which divorce may have actually benefitted the parents and the family. Barr contends that pre-adolescent school-age children are very family oriented and have a strong sense of family identity. Children at the pre-adolescent stage often have not had enough time to build a solid base of support outside the family,

as well as a string of achievements in various areas that can help boost self-esteem which is threatened by the effects of divorce.

### Children's Response to Divorce

The most frequent response to divorce of the pre-adolescent is anger (Barr, 1986). This is characterized by the child feeling that "it's not fair" and repeating this frequently and with vigor. Anger is also a common response because the pre-adolescent views parental breakup as the parents actually breaking the rules that they themselves have so strongly professed to their children. Pre-adolescent children also see parental divorce as an embarrassment. They are often outraged and humiliated by their parents' actions. This anger, according to Barr, may be reflected in the quality of the child's school work, in his/her behavior at school as evidenced by the alienation of friends, and in manifested inappropriate classroom behavior. "An angry child may also have a strong desire to hide what is happening at home, becoming lost in flurries of activity, which may be either constructive or destructive. A teacher may see a child who is angry at his/her parents' divorce as cool and collected on the outside while, in fact, he/she is seething on the inside" (p. 82).

In a study designed to assist teachers in helping children of divorce, Marburger (1987) outlines five stages experienced by children confronted by any major loss. These stages include 1) denial, 2) anger, 3) sadness, 4) reorientation, and 5) acceptance. Marburger states that children go through a mourning process which has a time range from six months to two years, with possible relapses occurring after the initial period of mourning. She contends that the child's ability to get through the mourning process is often closely tied to how the events surrounding the divorce are presented to the child. It

is not the legal process of divorce that most harms the child, states Marburger, but rather the lack of communication about what is happening around him/her. There is some evidence according to Marburger (1987) that the child's ability to process the divorce experience and adapt to its changes is closely linked to his/her chronological age and level of maturity. In a similar study, Wallerstein and Kelly (1976) found that pre-adolescent children have a more realistic understanding of divorce and are better able to express their feelings of anger. Their findings show that many children at this age did not feel responsible for their parents' divorce but were embarrassed and morally outraged at their parents' behavior. It seems that pre-adolescent children tend to have their loyalties divided between the parents and frequently feel lonely and rejected.

Marburger (1987) feels that a child's response to divorce is often quite visible in the classroom. While specific responses to divorce can take many forms, all are symptoms of stress. Marburger outlines six symptoms of stress which may be evident in the classroom. These include: 1) daydreaming, 2) nervousness, 3) weariness, 4) moodiness, 5) unexplained behaviors, and 6) declining grades. Secondary reactions to the stress of the divorce experience may include the following: a) physical complaints of stomach aches, headaches, sore muscles, rashes, and even tics, b) aggressive behavior evidenced by a child picking fights, talking out, and even destroying classroom materials, c) a child clinging to the teacher, d) the use of alcohol and/or drugs, and e) no change whatsoever evidenced in school due to the child's ability to repress stress.

Appel's (1985) research also reports that teachers may observe certain behaviors of students indicating a need for appropriate and/or special action to be taken by the teacher. Appel indicates that during the period of grief following the divorce, children



may lose sleep, appear lonely, need more reinforcement than usual, demonstrate a poor memory, and exhibit anger, guilt, or bitterness. A child may request to see the school nurse more frequently for stomachaches or headaches when the underlying cause is stress. The child may demonstrate a change in the manner of his/her dress, grooming habits, work habits, and may become more frequently tardy for school. The child may for no apparent reason exhibit emotional confusion, crying, unprovoked spurts of anger, or anxiety, as well as unexplained periods of euphoria. Appel (1985) states that children experiencing parental divorce may assume one of three new roles within the family or at school: the placater, the adjuster, and the troublemaker. The stress engendered by the crisis often, if not always, spills over into the academic setting (Butler, 1988).

#### The Role of the Teacher

Parental divorce during childhood can represent a significant loss of support in the life of a child. Children of divorce experience increased vulnerability and are at a greater risk of failing to successfully negotiate developmental tasks (Magrab, 1978; Pfeffer, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This vulnerability could be readily observed by a child's teacher. The possible consequences of this observed vulnerability may be reported by the teacher to a parent and/or another significant adult in the child's life to assist in avoiding potential developmental delays as suggested by Erikson (1985).

Smilansky (1992) feels that instructional settings such as schools provide experiences which are important to a child's cognitive, emotional, and social adjustment. School personnel, particularly teachers, have the ability to greatly influence students. The role of schools is not just important to children experiencing divorce but to parents as well. Schools can play an important part in working with a family experiencing divorce

because a large number of “experts” are available in schools, and schools have access to a multitude of resource agencies from which help is available. Smilansky (1992) states that the first authority outside of the family to which children refer questions about divorce is the teacher, making, in essence, that teacher a primary source of information and support. The ability of a caring teacher to support a child experiencing parental divorce is echoed by Ackerman (1997).

Smilansky’s study (1992), which included observation of teachers, uncovered several reactions when teachers attempted to cope with questions students raised about divorce. The first reaction was ignoring the child’s question. Teachers may act as though they did not hear the question and/or try to divert the child’s attention to another topic. Smilansky (1992) feels that this often occurs because the teacher is uncomfortable with the subject of divorce or wants to shield the child from the pain of divorce in some way by keeping the topic out of the child’s mind. A child encountering a teacher who chooses to ignore the divorce situation learns that divorce as a topic of discussion is a forbidden topic. Children learn not to raise questions even if the questions continue to bother them. This essentially leaves them with many confusions and conflicts for which they will have to find answers elsewhere (Smilansky, 1992).

Another common reaction of teachers confronted by family divorce is to only offer children generalized concepts about the subject requiring children to make inferences at a personal level. Smilansky (1992) feels that, in some cases, making the personal inferences from teacher’s statements is not easy for children, often resulting in the child feeling little benefit from the interaction. Smilansky observed and reports positively that some teachers have the ability to help a child translate the general to the

personal, helping the child clarify how the child sees the family divorce personally. Such assistance helps a child to understand the nature of the parents' divorce in terms of the child's and the family's lives. The translation process, according to Smilansky (1992), helps prevent a child from having distorted personal perceptions of divorce concepts. Reflecting back a child's feeling about divorce and expressing empathy offers an appropriate way to mirror back a child's feelings and to give those feelings legitimacy. Ultimately, this type of reaction helps the child in achieving a more appropriate concept of divorce.

It is important for teachers to initiate parent-teacher discussions. A conference can assist parents in both emotionally supporting children and helping them develop personal and generalized concepts of divorce (Smilansky, 1992). It is important to invite both parents (together) to a parent-teacher discussion since it sends a message to the child that, even though parents may be divorced, they are still both responsible for the child. In addition, a conference can increase and/or improve parents' awareness of the effects of divorce on their child (Smilansky, 1992).

Carlile (1991) also feels that there are several things teachers can do to help children experiencing parental divorce. She encourages teachers to know their students and recommends that they identify children of divorce early in the school year, as well as to identify the year that the parents separated. Carlile (1991) also feels that teachers should encourage children to talk about their feelings. She recommends that teachers use bibliotherapy, the use of children's fiction literature to help a child understand a concept, as a tool for class discussion that can allow a child to express his/her feelings..

In addition to bibliotherapy, Yauman (1991) recommends the use of media, including filmstrips, films, and videos, as well as the use of board games such as *The Acting, Feeling, and Choosing Game*, as part of the counseling programs made available to children in schools. Role-play, skits, drawing, and puppetry in group counseling sessions may also be useful.

Carlile (1991) feels that a teacher's language in the classroom should be modified to acknowledge and allow for the variety of family structures represented in the classroom. If parents are normally brought into the classroom or school for certain events, step-parents and grandparents should perhaps be included. Carlile exhorts teachers to be patient with children experiencing parental divorce and to be tolerant of their behavior changes. She strongly suggests, even though it may be difficult, that communication with parents be kept open. It may become necessary for teachers to adjust parent conference times and to make evening telephone calls when parents are home from work.

It may also be appropriate for a teacher to refer the child to an appropriate mental health professional (Smilansky, 1992). An advantage of a referral is the specialized training to treat the child and help him/her deal with specific problems. The disadvantage, according to Smilansky (1992), is that the teacher may be conveying the message to the child that the teacher is incapable of dealing with parental divorce or is not interested in dealing with the child's problems. Although professional counseling may be essential to the child's adjustment to parental divorce, it must not substitute for divorce-related communication within the teacher-student relationship (Smilansky, 1992).

It is often true that children may lean on their teachers in times of stress if they feel comfortable with them (Marburger, 1987). When this is true, teachers are often thrust

into the role of counselor, making it necessary for them to have some basic conferencing skills. Marburger (1987) feels that it is important for a teacher to be skilled in listening. Eye contact and nonverbal skills are vital in letting the child know that the teacher is listening. Paraphrasing skills are also important for teachers in summarizing the conference session and bringing closure to the conference. Adequate record keeping is beneficial to the teacher, including logs of telephone conversations with those involved with the child outside the classroom.

Marburger (1987) offers teachers advice in working with children of divorce. She recommends keeping in contact with both parents to share pertinent information about a child's classroom behavior. Teachers can be of great help to these children by initiating class discussions about divorce as well as by reading an article or story to the class about divorce and asking for responses from students. The idea of using class discussion as a strategy to meet the needs of children experiencing parental divorce is supported by Smilansky (1992) who states that it is through a class discussions that a child's general and personal concept of divorce is enhanced. Discussions also make legitimate the act of talking about and raising questions about divorce and expressing related feelings. Special programs, such as helping parents experiencing divorce or providing training for teachers about divorce and its effects on children, should be encouraged both inside and outside of the school setting (Smilansky, 1992).

Hammond's (1981) survey research shows that the most helpful thing a teacher can do for a child experiencing divorce is to let him/her talk about his/her feelings. The teacher should be a willing and accepting listener, without making judgements or prying into a child's personal matters. Teachers can effectively help the child order his/her world

as a way to better gain control over the stressful situation. Butler (1988) states that creating a low-stress environment in the classroom is vital. Through the setting of clear expectations, reducing ambiguity in the classroom, and minimizing the opportunities for frustration a feeling of security and stability can be conveyed in the classroom.

In stressful times, children need clear expectations (Appel, 1985; Chandler, 1981; Diamond, 1985; Fairchild, 1986). Adults and teachers in particular are powerful role models for children, great mediators, and environmental manipulators. For a child, the adult is the person in charge, bringing order out of chaos, correcting wrongs, balancing injustices, and controlling forces which may seem overwhelming to the child (Chandler, 1987). Getting involved in something bigger than the problem experienced by the child can be a reprieve for him/her from the tension he/she is experiencing. Volunteer work (Butler, 1988) assists in building a child's self-esteem during this time of stress. Teachers can suggest ways in which a child can let both parents know that he/she cares. Helping students remember family birthdays, holiday gifts, and recognizing other special family occasions can be particularly beneficial during this time (Appel, 1985).

At all times a teacher should avoid calling attention to the child's family divorce situation (Butler, 1988). A two parent family pictured in textual material only reinforces that the child experiencing parental divorce is in an atypical situation (Appel, 1985). It is beneficial for teachers to point out that there are many types of families when the two parent family is depicted in textual material (Diamond, 1985).

Marburger (1987) outlines three suggestions for teachers in working with children of divorce: 1) the problem should not be ignored, 2) information shared by either parent about the child must be kept completely confidential — shared only with those directly

involved with the child's education, and 3) the child's privacy must be respected at all times. It is recommended that children of divorce needing additional services be informed of the various service agencies available to them outside of the school.

Graver and Morse (1986) also feel that teachers are in a good position to observe the behavior of children experiencing divorce. Parents going through a divorce become so emotionally involved that they may be unaware of the feelings or behaviors of their children. Teachers can observe the child's development and suggest intervention as well as support to parents of these children.

#### Divorce Education and How Schools Can Help Children of Divorce

In extended interviews with 120 elementary and pre-school teachers, Smilansky (1992) asked each teacher to list the problems which they encountered with children of divorce as well as the situations encountered in which the teachers needed advice or help. All of the teachers interviewed felt that they did not know enough about divorce and its effects on children. All of the participants expressed an interest in being trained to better handle situations that may arise.

Green's (1989) research shows a dramatic positive impact of divorce education on teachers' perceptions of children experiencing divorce as well as their attitudes about their responsibilities to children of broken homes. In this study, she administered a Lickert scale questionnaire to 117 respondents in the areas of a) knowledge about divorce in the United States and its effects on children, b) opinions on divorce, and c) the role of the school in working with children of divorce. Green found teachers of children in preschool through grade three to hold the opinion that children experiencing divorce had special problems or needs ( $F= 3.22; p<.03$ ). Teachers of older children did not share this

belief. Years of teaching was not a significant factor related to teacher opinion, teacher role, or teacher knowledge about children experiencing divorce. Green's study indicated that a difference existed between teachers with divorce education and those without ( $F=3.96$ ;  $p<.05$ ) with regard to the role of the school in helping children from broken homes. Teachers with divorce education felt the school should assume a strong role in providing children of divorce with special assistance. Those without divorce education did not share this opinion. Green (1989) cautions that teachers should not automatically assume that all children of divorce will experience problems in learning or with social adjustment. She concluded that divorce does not always cause academic or behavioral problems, but he does advocate divorce education, in inservice training for teachers, so that teachers can gain an awareness that children experiencing parental divorce may experience school-related problems. However, Green warns teachers to beware of expecting problems when some children may not actually be experiencing them.

Frieman (1997) feels that schools can decrease the adverse classroom effects of family divorce by recognizing and responding to the child's feelings and by involving both parents in the child's education. Both teachers and principals can have a direct impact on lessening the effects of parental separation and divorce in school settings. One way to do this is to listen carefully to students. According to Frieman (1997), students will reveal glimpses into their private lives through conversations with peers and school staff, as well as through journal writing. It is the teacher's responsibility to report to parents and to appropriate school officials a student's acting out behaviors and symptoms of depression. The building principal is also identified as a positive link between school



and community agencies from which children and possibly families can obtain help, especially in schools without counseling or social work services available.

Wallerstein (1980) concludes that divorce is one of the most complex and stressful mental health issue faced by children. She states that the school serves as a support system in diverse ways for different children of different ages. The child's ability to use the school for support increases significantly with age. The Wallerstein studies (1980, 1989) show that the school can provide structure for a child's life at a time when the major structure of his/her life, the family, is dissolving. All structural supports provided by the school — homework, routine classroom tasks and social contacts — can assist the child in adapting to divorce. Wallerstein's findings suggest that the school best serves as a good support system to children who are above average intelligence, doing well academically to begin with, and who were, prior to the divorce, psychologically healthy. Children in this case did not depend solely on the teacher to be a supportive figure, although a good relationship with the teacher helped. Some children, however, did only receive support at school by their close relationship to and reliance upon a friendly teacher. Wallerstein indicates that the nurturance provided by the friendly teacher did not necessarily have "staying power" in the child's ultimate capacity to cope with the divorce, but notes that it is important for a teacher who observes the continuing need of the child for reassurance to discuss the child's vulnerability with parents before the child's academic progress becomes seriously compromised. Ackerman (1997) agrees that the school can be useful to a child experiencing parental divorce because it provides structure in his/her life when other structures (i.e. the family system) are crumbling.

Wallerstein notes that pre-adolescent children had difficulty acquiring the ability to develop and maintain positive peer relationships if they have been frequently exposed to marital fighting and violence in their families prior to divorce. She concludes that few children experiencing parental divorce actually use the school network, and there is little evidence to suggest that the school, as it currently functions, provides support that shapes or determines the child's ultimate outcome with the process of divorce. Ackerman (1997) agrees with Wallerstein that a child's ability to use the school as a viable support system does increase with age. The older a child, the better the child is able to articulate specific needs to school personnel.

Graver and Morse (1986) state that although there are many possible sources of support for children experiencing divorce, the school is one of the most logical since it has contact with children on a regular basis for a significant amount of time. According to these authors, a school provides a relatively stable environment for children, and in some cases school personnel are the only stable people with whom a child may come in contact during this time. Teachers and counselors are often the significant role models.

Although some children appear to cope well with divorce, others seem to experience specific developmental delays or disruptions that can impact school performance. Hess and Camara (1979) found in a study of 32 white boys and girls ages 9-11, that children in divorced families were less productive in schoolwork as measured by school records and teacher ratings. The study by Hess and Camara included 16 children from intact families and 16 children in recently divorced families. Zinsmeister (1996) reports that children from divorced families are twice as likely to repeat a grade in elementary school and are five times more likely to be expelled or suspended from

school. Ackerman (1997) feels that children need the help of adults when they experience parental divorce. Historically, schools have intervened in situations when others did not adequately handle the problems of children (Ackerman, 1997).

Walker (1993) finds that many children often do not continue to do well in school immediately after parental divorce. She states that teachers and parents alike do not always remember that parental divorce has a direct effect on children as well as on their parents. According to Walker, how parents, teachers, and children deal with this situation will have a profound impact on the remainder of the child's life.

#### Counseling for Children of Divorce

Hammond (1979) reports in a study of 165 children in grades three through six attending two elementary schools in a lower-middle to middle-class community in Michigan, that elementary school students named peers and the school counselor as people with whom they could talk. A support group led by a school counselor would therefore combine as the most often chosen supportive persons to help children. In Hammond's study of children in grades three through six attending two elementary schools in a lower-middle to middle class suburban community, seventy-seven percent of the children said that if the school counselor were to ask them how they feel, it would be helpful. In addition, sixty-four percent said they would rank counseling groups as positive. This strategy is supported by Butler (1988), who states that it is important for teachers to let children experiencing divorce know that others care about them and that others have experienced the same feelings as they have experienced. In a study by Graver and Morse (1986), the researchers state that individual counseling interventions, whether

by therapy, a professional counselor, or through an understanding relative, friend, or teacher can be helpful.

Sheridan, Baker, and Lorrovoy (1984) state that often children experiencing divorce are not recommended for counseling because their immediate needs and behaviors appear to be similar to those of children in intact families. Their study revealed that children who received group counseling with prevention goals from the onset of the divorce process benefitted more than those children who received individual counseling that was essentially remedial (after the divorce occurred). Hammond (1979) describes a group for children of divorce as “a place where children can share feelings, common experiences, problems, and possible solutions; learn communication skills; receive and experience empathy; and enjoy the satisfaction of helping others” (p.12).

Graver and Morse (1986) outline three models identified by Baker in a 1980 study that help children of divorce: The Family Counseling Model, the Educational Model, and the Self-Help (or Support) Model. The Family Counseling Model provides short-term, child-focused family counseling for children and families experiencing the crisis of separation, divorce, and even remarriage. This model is eclectic in that it uses a variety of concepts and/or techniques, from individual and family systems approaches to brief, individual therapy. It is a problem-oriented approach which focuses on the specific, individual needs of the family. The Educational Model is a short-term instructional approach to provide information and skills to parents and children who are experiencing separation, divorce, and remarriage. This model employs structured classroom experiences to improve parenting and family functioning. The Self-Help Model is a peer support group in which participants share experiences, receive support, and provide

assistance to others in similar situations. The primary activity of this model is informal discussion and outside activity planned by the participants.

According to Frieman (1994), schools, through the work of school counselors and teachers, can play an important role in helping children process feelings related to parental divorce, thereby helping to minimize potential adverse academic consequences of parental divorce. Frieman strongly advocates that counselors involve both parents in school-initiated divorce program at the elementary school level. He reports that a study by Wilcoxon (1986) urges school counselors to use a family systems approach in which the child is seen as the client within the family and the entire family is part of the treatment plan. Frieman (1994) states that counselors can be of great help to children of divorce by taking a leadership role in ensuring that the school staff involves both parents in all aspects of their child's school life. One way to do this is to place the non-custodial parent on the school mailing list to receive school newsletters and other official communications. Another way in which counselors can help is to see that non-custodial parents are made aware of children's homework assignments so that the non-custodial parent can focus on the child and his/her homework. Frieman (1994) suggests that counselors offer morning and evening child care seminars for parents, which may be especially beneficial to fathers. Serving as an information resource by offering an early morning "ask the counselor" open phone line provides assistance and advice to parents about child rearing. He states that another way in which counselors can help parents is to assist them in keeping children out of the middle of disputes between ex-spouses.

During times of such extreme familial disruption as divorce, parents may be under so much stress that they are not capable of providing the support and guidance needed by

their children. If and when parents are not capable of providing the support, school professionals become a critical source of support, nurturance, and stability (Bonkowski, Bequette, & Boomhower, 1984; Goldman & King, 1985; Pfeifer & Abrams, 1984). Providing support services in schools permits the grouping of children by developmental level, normalizing their experiences, and allowing for the development of an ongoing support system (Drake, 1981; Kalter, Pickar & Lesowitz, 1984). Group counseling made available in the school can also be effective because children are already present in the setting. Group counseling is perceived by some researchers as the most practical, effective, and efficient treatment (Bonkowski, 1984; Cantrell, 1986; Green, 1978; Hammond, 1981; Wilkinson & Bleck, 1977).

Ackerman (1997) reports that appropriate approaches of school psychologists could be used or adapted to work with children of divorce, including those classified as direct, indirect, or preventive. A direct approach involves counseling groups of children from single parent homes experiencing difficulties related to divorce. In an indirect approach, the goal for school personnel is to produce a positive change in knowledge, attitudes, and educational approaches used in order to improve the education and school-life of children. The goal of a preventive approach is to provide individual and/or group support to children currently experiencing family changes while providing educational experience to all students that would prepare them to understand and cope with inevitable family change in their lives including parental separation, divorce, and even death. According to Ackerman (1997), planned group experiences help children cope with and adjust to the disruptive changes in family structures by providing them with hope, appropriate information, and support.

### Mental Health Strategies

Miller and Cherry (1991), writing for the National Association of School Psychologists, feel that children need firm structure with support when they are coping with a difficult situation. These researchers believe that teachers need to be sensitive to the needs of children who might need mental health services while experiencing parental divorce and so that they can make appropriate referrals. They believe the school can provide divorced parents with information about the impact of divorce on the child as well as with information about the reactions of children experiencing divorce. Hodges (1986) recommends that support groups be held for upper elementary school age children. The support groups should consist of no more than ten children and should be held for 30-35 minutes weekly.

Among mental health professionals, some believe that as long as a child does not show symptoms to indicate crisis, divorce related problems should be ignored (Smilansky, 1992). Other mental health professionals feel it is primarily the teacher's responsibility to cope with the divorce-related problems of students. These professionals believe that it may be the role of a school mental health professional to guide and help teachers in working with children of divorce. In one approach of empowering teachers, Smilansky (1992) outlines a system in which the teacher and mental health professional work together in the classroom to lead discussions on the topic of divorce. It would be the responsibility of the school mental health professional to teach teachers how to talk to a child experiencing divorce in his/her family, as well as how to lead class discussions. The underlying assumption in this belief is that it is the responsibility of the teacher to help children cope with crises.

Smilansky (1992) lists several types of treatment models available for children and families affected by divorce. These include individual treatment, group work with children and individuals affected, and group guidance for parents. The school mental health professional (guidance counselor, social worker, and psychologist) can effectively use each as a single method of treatment or can combine methods. These treatments may be effective without teachers or in consultation with them. Since the child spends a great deal of time in school, Smilansky (1992) believes that school-based treatment is best for many children. School-based treatment at the inception of a crisis can often prevent the stigma associated with referral to treatment outside the school. Sometimes, however, a referral to an outside mental health agency may be the most appropriate treatment. Even if a child is treated outside the school, Smilansky notes that the child looks to the school as the primary support in the struggle to cope with the divorce and to attain better adjustment (Smilansky, 1992). The school mental health professional and the teacher are therefore vital links between the school and outside treatment facilities.

### Summary

Knowledge about the effects of parental divorce on children is limited by both quantity and quality of available research (Behrman & Quinn, 1994). This chapter has provided an overview of divorce in the United States with relationship to school-age children according to the most recent census data (Clarke, 1995). It also discusses children's responses to parental divorce as well as the important role of the teacher and other school personnel to children experiencing parental divorce (Hammond, 1981; Marburger, 1987). Divorce education and its usefulness to teachers is outlined and



provides insight for schools and institutions providing pre-service teacher education for planning for curriculum in this area (Greene, 1989; Smilansky, 1992).

This chapter provides information about how schools can help children of divorce. Frieman (1997) outlines ways in which schools can decrease the adverse effects of parental divorce in the classroom. The Wallerstein studies (1989, 1980) show that all structural supports provided by a school can assist a child experiencing parental divorce. The role of peer and professional counseling is also discussed in this chapter as is the relationship of a child's developmental stages to parental divorce (Jellinek & Slovik, 1981; Magrab, 1976; Pheffer, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Finally, this chapter discusses the role of mental health professionals in working with school-age children experiencing divorce.

The following chapter outlines a description of this study's design, the population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis for this study. Using survey methodology and interviews, the three sample groups included in this study — parents, educators, and social service professionals — give their perceptions of the most appropriate role and the most effective services for a school to provide in the event of parental divorce.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### Introduction

This chapter describes the design of the study, the methodology of data collection including instrumentation, the validity of the survey instrument, and the data analysis process. This study addresses the recommendations of three rater groups— parents, educators, and social service professionals— in determining an appropriate and effective role for the school in working with children of divorce reported by the researcher who is the principal of the elementary school where data were collected.

#### Design of the Study

The current study of the role of the school in working with children of divorce is a descriptive study concerned with information obtained by the return of a mailed questionnaire and by interviewing a selected sample of respondents who returned questionnaires (Frankel & Wallen, 1993). This study uses survey and interview methodology (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1985; Frankel & Wallen, 1993) The survey was used to collect recommendations for the role of the school in working with children of divorce from three groups: parents of children who have experienced divorce, educators of children in grades kindergarten through six, and social service professionals.

The survey sample was selected based on their connection with Geneva Elementary School, a school of nearly 456 students located in Geneva, a city of 6,700 in Ashtabula County, Ohio. The population of the city of Geneva is primarily white although there are some African-American and Hispanic families residing in the city. According to census data, the median income for Geneva residents was \$25,000. The

population of Geneva clusters around the ages of 30-35 as well as in the above 55 age range. Geneva Elementary School, a microcosm of the city of Geneva demographically, is part of the Geneva Area City School District, a semi-rural school district of approximately 3,400 students. Geneva Elementary School houses 31 staff members, both regular classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through six, and itinerant teachers such as those teaching music, physical education, art, special education, and Title I Reading and Math. According to school records, of the nearly 500 students in the building, approximately 60 percent are categorized as living in poverty as measured by the number of students receiving free and reduced meals under federal guidelines. Between 45 and 60 percent of the families of children attending Geneva Elementary School are classified as “single-parent” families; some of these are partially resulting from families dissolved by parental divorce. The researcher is the principal at Geneva Elementary School, in Geneva, Ohio.

Parents selected to be surveyed are parents of children who have experienced divorce while in grades four, five, or six. Educators selected for this study are employed at Geneva Elementary School. Social service professionals selected for the study are those who work or have worked with the Geneva Elementary School community population directly or indirectly. The survey instrument (see Appendix A) was developed over a two-year period of time and derives content validity from its being reported in current research on children of divorce. Each of the areas surveyed is reflected in the current professional literature. Content validity of the survey instrument has also been established in that it was submitted to chair of the dissertation committee, as well as to other committee members for extensive review and revision. The survey instrument was

also submitted for review by individuals in each respondent category for possible editing and revision. The Human Subjects Committee at Youngstown State University was asked to review the survey instrument as well as the overall content of this study. A signed copy of the approval letter was received on August 11, 1998 (see Appendix B).

A subset of each group of survey respondents— parents, educators, and social service professionals — was selected, based on their positive response to questions on the survey dealing with personal experience with parental divorce, to be interviewed. Also, no person in any group could be selected to be interviewed unless he/she a) was a divorced person of at least one year, b) had someone in his/her extended family who was divorced with children in elementary school, or c) had a friend who was divorced with children at the elementary school level. In addition to the three survey respondent groups, two school support persons, a school secretary and a guidance counselor, were interviewed to obtain information from yet another perspective. All three participant groups in this study responded to an identical survey. Each interviewee was randomly selected from the pool respondents qualified to be interviewed.

Each interviewee received and signed a letter of informed consent to participate in this study, giving him/her the opportunity to discontinue participation in the study at any time. None of the interview respondents opted to discontinue his/her participation. Each interviewee was asked the same questions and all interviews were recorded and transcribed with the permission of each respondent. (Interview questions are found in Appendix E.)

### Data Collection

The survey instrument gathered information about strategies each respondent sees as most effective for working with children of divorce in the school setting as well as what he/she sees as the most appropriate strategies for a school to employ in working with children experiencing parental divorce. An analysis and interpretation of survey results, triangulated with interview response data, determined which strategies for working with children of divorce in schools were seen as being most effective and most appropriate by parents, educators, and social service professionals.

### Instrumentation

The survey instrument designed by the researcher contains 16 questions relating to specific areas addressed by the research questions of this study. The first group of questions contained in the survey instrument (questions 1-5) are demographic questions regarding the respondent's age, gender, marital status, and parenthood. The second group of questions (questions 6-8) establishes the respondent's personal experience with and first-hand knowledge of divorce and its effect on elementary school age children. The third group of survey questions (questions 9-10) lists possible strategies, services, and supports for working with children of divorce at the elementary school level and elicits the respondent's evaluation of their effectiveness for use in working with children and of their appropriateness for use in the school setting. The next question (question 11) addresses sub-research question 2: The school's response to a child experiencing divorce in the personal and/or professional experience of the respondent. The next questions (questions 13-15) deal with the main research question: What is the role of the school when a family dissolves, as well as with sub-research question three: What should the

role of the school be in the event of parental divorce. Finally, respondents were asked to rate how well schools with which they are familiar have worked with children of divorce. The main research question and all of the sub-research questions were addressed in follow-up interviews with the sample of selected respondents. The basic interview questions are available in Appendix E.

### Procedures

A cover letter was used as the vehicle of approach for each group of respondents. It explained the importance of the study as well as the significance of its results. Each respondent was guaranteed anonymity (see Appendix C).

Even though more than the anticipated 50 to 60 percent return rate was achieved from the initial inquiry, a follow-up procedure was initiated. The second mailing was sent to the 20 nonrespondents from the parent group, the 10 from the social service professional group, and the 2 from the educator group. The second letter contained a polite reminder of failure to respond and encouragement to do so (see Appendix D). The second mailing resulted in the return of two additional surveys from the parent group.

Based on an affirmative response given to questions 6, 7, or 8, as well as the respondent's signed willingness to be interviewed, two respondents from each sample group were selected at random to be interviewed. Interview questions reflect the primary and sub-research questions of this study and were designed to elicit more in-depth responses about survey questions as well as to gain a personal perspective into the specific needs of an elementary school-age child whose parents have divorced. (A general interview outline is found in Appendix E, and interview transcripts are found in Appendix F.

### Data Analysis

Survey data were entered into the SPSS program in the computer lab at Youngstown State University. The SPSS program was used to calculate the statistics needed to define and describe the survey data.

The mean of each Lickert scale item was calculated for each participant group — social service professionals, educators, and parents. The mean responses from the three groups were compared using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures to determine whether the three groups have common responses to any of the items. The Scheffe post hoc procedure determined significant contrasts between the mean scores of the three respondent groups. Statistical significance was set at the  $p < .05$  level for Scheffe contrasts.

Survey data were analyzed statistical measures comparing agreement among the three groups surveyed about the most effective supports and the most appropriate services schools can offer children experiencing parental divorce. The research question addressed by this study is: What should the role of the school be when a family dissolves as viewed from the perspectives of educators, parents, and social service professionals? Sub-questions addressed by this study include:

1. To what extent does a divorce impact a child's behavior and/or achievement in school?
2. What typically has been the school's response based on the personal or professional experience of those participating in this study?
3. What is the most appropriate response for a school to best meet the needs of a child in the event of parental divorce?

4. What is most effective for a school do to in order to meet the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce?

The independent variable of the respondent's experience with divorce, personally or as experienced by a relative or close friend, was examined through further analysis of demographic survey data and through the in-depth interview process of information gathering. Through the open-ended portion of the survey, respondents' recommendations for services to be provided by schools for children experiencing divorce were analyzed and compared across respondents and respondent groups. In-depth interviews of respondents from each participant group added a more personal and in-depth insight to services currently provided for children experiencing divorce compared to those which may be more appropriate and/or effective.

#### Summary

This study's survey and interview methodology, including the population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis, are designed to gain information and better understanding about the role schools can and/or should play when a family dissolves in order to better serve the children involved. The next chapter reports the results of the statistical and qualitative analysis of the survey data as well as a description and analysis of the interviews conducted with selected respondents. Recommendations generated by the three separate respondent groups are presented, and areas of agreement or disagreement among the three groups will be discussed.



## CHAPTER 4

### Analysis of the Data

#### Introduction

The focus of this study was to explore from the perspectives of parents, educators, and social service professionals possible roles for the school to assume in the event of parental divorce. This study explores perceptions of the three respondent groups—parents, educators, and social service professionals—whether children experience problems at school coincident with divorce. This study examines the perceptions of respondents to determine whether the school has a role in helping a child through the experience of parental divorce, and whether schools are perceived to currently provide certain services to children experiencing parental divorce or have the capacity to do so presently. Also examined are the services perceived as effective in assisting children through the experience of divorce. Assuming that schools should have a role in meeting certain needs of children experiencing parental divorce, this study examines which, if any, of the services that are perceived by respondents as effective and appropriate for schools to provide.

This chapter addresses these questions in order and examines the perceptions of each of the three respondent groups as discerned by means of professional opinion in the current literature, a survey (see Appendix A), and through interviews of select respondents (Interview questions found in Appendix E; interview transcripts found in Appendix F).

### Return Rates

The survey instrument was distributed to 30 faculty members of Geneva Elementary School, 30 parents of children in grades 4-6 at Geneva Elementary School who have been divorced not less than one year or more than seven years, and 30 social service professionals serving the Geneva Elementary School community in Ashtabula County, Ohio. After an initial mailing to each group of respondents, a second mailing including a follow-up letter sent to non-respondents. While the response rates of educators and social service professionals were exceptionally high, the rate of parent participation was lower. This suggests that the reader use caution in the interpretation of the results of this research to the parent population. Table 1 summarizes the return results of the mailing.

Table I

#### Survey Return Rates

| Role               | Initial Mailing | Returns |         | Second Mailing | Returns |         | Total Returns |         |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------|---------|----------------|---------|---------|---------------|---------|
|                    |                 | N       | Percent |                | N       | Percent | N             | Percent |
| Parents            | 30              | 9       | 30.0    | 21             | 2       | 9.5     | 11            | 36.7    |
| Educators          | 30              | 28      | 93.3    | 2              | 0       | 0.0     | 28            | 93.3    |
| S.S. Professionals | 30              | 25      | 83.3    | 5              | 0       | 0.0     | 25            | 83.3    |
| Total              | 90              | 62      | 68.9    | 28             | 2       | 2.2     | 64            | 71.1    |

### Survey Respondents

This study of the role of the school when a family dissolves surveyed the entire staff of Geneva Elementary School, a building serving 456 children in grades K-6 located in Ashtabula County, Ohio. The second group surveyed were parents of children attending Geneva Elementary School in grades 4,5,6, who have experienced a divorce not less than one year ago or more than seven years ago. The third group surveyed were social service professionals in the Ashtabula County, Ohio area who work with school age children in grades 4,5, and 6 in the Geneva Elementary School community. A total of 28 educators, 25 social service professionals, and 11 parents responded to an identical survey representing a response rate of 93%, 83%, and 37% respectively. Overall 71% of those surveyed responded.

### Profile of Respondents

Survey questions 6-8 establish the respondents' personal experience and first-hand knowledge of divorce and its effect on elementary school age children. Nearly all of the respondents reported having at least one personal experience with divorce sometime in their lives. The greatest number of respondents reported a friend being divorced while the respondent and friend were in elementary school. With these statistics one could assume that the respondents might provide informed insight into the needs of elementary school-age children experiencing parental divorce, and could perhaps provide valuable perceptions about effective supports and appropriate services schools might provide for them. Table 2 summarizes survey responses for questions 6-8.

Table 2

Respondents' Experience with Divorce

| Experience with Divorce   | Parents |         | Educators |         | Social Service Professionals |         |
|---|---------|---------|-----------|---------|------------------------------|---------|
|   | N       | Percent | N         | Percent | N                            | Percent |
| Family divorced while respondent was in elementary school                     | 3       | 27      | 3         | 11      | 2                            | 8       |
| Extended family member was divorced while respondent was in elementary school | 8       | 73      | 9         | 32      | 13                           | 52      |
| Friend was divorced while respondent was in elementary school                 | 10      | 91      | 27        | 96      | 16                           | 64      |

Problems Children Experience Coincident with Divorce

The literature suggests that a substantial proportion, although not all children may experience problems incident to divorce. These problems may include anger, stress manifested in physical or emotional symptoms, grief, and emotional difficulties (Appel, 1985; Barr, 1986; Marburger, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980).

Both parents interviewed indicated that there was a dramatic change in their children's behavior resulting from their divorce. The parents stated that children acted out as evidenced by arguing with the parent and exhibiting aggressive verbal and physical behavior, perhaps resulting from the decrease in attention they had been used to in a two-parent family situation. One parent felt that many daily household chores required of a parent were taking time away from the time she had with her children. This parent stated that the children would often "demand her attention" by saying that the daily chores could wait. Both parents indicated that their children needed to feel secure in the new family

situation. This was exemplified by the child often asking his mother to rub his back at night before bed time and wanting his mother present before being able to go to sleep.

Social service professionals felt that divorce impacts a child's life by causing a lack of stability in the daily routine. Divorce brings change to families including such things as shared custody, a new school, altered family finances, and new daycare arrangements. This results in the child feeling unstable and in a state of transition. One of the social service professionals remarked that children often act out as a result of parental divorce, exhibiting behaviors which are unusual for them. This social service professional also remarked that children often learn to manipulate parents during divorce, in some cases taking advantage of the situation to obtain material things.

School support persons interviewed indicated that there are very definite changes in a child's school behavior when he/she is experiencing parental divorce. This is evidenced by a drop in grades, aggressive behavior in the classroom, and withdrawal from a peer group. One support person has seen children appear to lose a sense of direction and stability in their lives which is clearly evident in the school setting when they angrily lash out at those around them. Another support person remarked that children seem actually to grieve at the loss of their family as if they had experienced a death in the family.

Educators interviewed stated that children often respond to parental divorce in extreme ways. A child may either exhibit a drop in grades and a significant change in behavior in the classroom or may show no outwardly visible signs that anything in his/her life has changed. One educator responded that parental divorce "gives children a sense

that their lives are out of control.” This educator also pointed out that a change in behavior in the classroom often occurs at the time of parental divorce.

Interviewees generally agree that children experience problems— behavioral and academic— coincident with parental divorce. This suggests the need for children to have support as they experience parental divorce and perhaps after with some of these supports being made available in schools. This is examined in the next section.

#### Perceptions of How Schools Typically Respond to Divorce

The literature suggests that there is a definite role for the teacher in responding to the needs of children experiencing parental divorce. Children involved in a parental divorce experience increased vulnerability and are at a greater risk of failing to successfully negotiate specific developmental tasks (Pfeffer, 1981; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). This vulnerability could be readily observed by a child’s teacher. Carlile (1991) encourages teachers to know their students and recommends that teachers identify children of divorce early in the year, as well as the importance of identifying the year in which the parents separated. Carlile also recommends the use of bibliotherapy and class discussions to help children understand and conceptualize their present family situation.

Smilansky (1992) suggests that it may be necessary and important for a teacher to refer the child experiencing parental divorce to an appropriate mental health professional. Professional counseling outside of the school, counseling within the school setting, and some type of support group is reported in literature as being an appropriate response for schools to offer children experiencing parental divorce (Hammond, 1979; Marburger, 1987; Smilansky, 1992).

Respondents in this study perceived neither the schools nor educators as a group particularly able or well prepared to address the needs of children experiencing parental divorce. Table 3 outlines the responses in these areas.

Table 3  
Extent to which Faculty is Prepared to Work with Children of Divorce

| Group/Extent | Parents |         | Educators |         | S.S. Professionals |         | Total |         |
|--------------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|
|              | N       | Percent | N         | Percent | N                  | Percent | N     | Percent |
| Quite a bit  | 1       | 9       | 0         | 0       | 0                  | 0       | 1     | 2       |
| Somewhat     | 3       | 27      | 19        | 70      | 9                  | 36      | 31    | 48      |
| Not at all   | 1       | 9       | 4         | 14      | 5                  | 20      | 10    | 16      |
| Don't know   | 6       | 55      | 4         | 14      | 11                 | 44      | 21    | 33      |
| Total        | 11      | 100     | 27        | 98      | 25                 | 100     | 63    | 99      |

Not all respondents answered each survey question.

Seventy percent of educators responding to the survey indicated that they are somewhat prepared to deal with parental divorce, while 55% of parents and 44% of social service professionals indicated that they did not know how well the school faculty was prepared for divorce situations. There appears to be a question being raised among parents and social service professionals about the adequacy of training educators receive in the area of children and divorce. Only one respondent felt that faculty are well prepared to work with children of divorce. Several respondents indicated a need for staff development in the area of children of divorce, as well as the importance of schools being familiar with local agencies which could assist the school in providing services to these children. One educator stated that there is a need for information from school administrators, when available, indicating which children are experiencing parental divorce.

Table 4 outlines perceptions of the school's ability as contrasted to merely staff preparedness to work with children of divorce.

Table 4  
Rating of the School's Ability to Work with Children of Divorce

| Group/Rating | Parents |         | Educators |         | S.S. Professionals |         | Total |         |
|--------------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|
|              | N       | Percent | N         | Percent | N                  | Percent | N     | Percent |
| Outstanding  | 0       | 0       | 0         | 0       | 0                  | 0       | 0     | 0       |
| Good         | 3       | 27      | 7         | 25      | 3                  | 12      | 13    | 20      |
| Fair         | 5       | 46      | 15        | 53      | 10                 | 40      | 30    | 47      |
| Poor         | 1       | 9       | 3         | 11      | 3                  | 12      | 7     | 11      |
| Don't know   | 2       | 18      | 3         | 11      | 9                  | 36      | 14    | 22      |
| Total        | 11      | 100     | 28        | 100     | 25                 | 100     | 64    | 100     |

Overall, 47% of respondents rated the school's ability to work with children experiencing parental divorce as fair. No respondent rated the school's ability to work with these children as outstanding. These responses evidence a perceived need to improve and expand the ability of schools to offer services to support children experiencing divorce.

To determine if the services reported in the literature are currently available in schools, respondents were asked to report on their experience. A relatively few services are currently available. Only three of eight services were known in their experience on more than a quarter of the respondents. These were talking with the teacher (64%), individual counseling (50%), and special attention from the teacher (47%). Table 5 outlines respondent's perceptions of what services are currently available in schools.



Table 5

Respondents' Perceptions of Services Currently Available in Schools for Children Experiencing Parental Divorce

| Service                        | Parents |         | Educators |         | S.S. Professionals |         | Total |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|---------|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|
|                                | N       | Percent | N         | Percent | N                  | Percent | N     | Percent |
| Individual Counseling          | 6       | 55      | 20        | 71      | 6                  | 24      | 32    | 50      |
| Art Therapy                    | 0       | 0       | 0         | 0       | 1                  | 4       | 1     | 2       |
| Special attention from teacher | 3       | 27      | 17        | 61      | 10                 | 40      | 30    | 47      |
| Support Group                  | 0       | 0       | 2         | 7       | 7                  | 28      | 9     | 14      |
| Group Counseling               | 0       | 0       | 4         | 14      | 1                  | 4       | 5     | 8       |
| Grief Therapy                  | 0       | 0       | 1         | 4       | 0                  | 0       | 1     | 2       |
| Family Counseling              | 1       | 9       | 4         | 14      | 0                  | 0       | 5     | 8       |
| Peer Counseling                | 0       | 0       | 1         | 4       | 2                  | 8       | 3     | 5       |
| Talking with teacher           | 7       | 64      | 19        | 69      | 15                 | 60      | 41    | 64      |
| Total Respondents              | 11      |         | 28        |         | 25                 |         | 64    |         |

Fifty-one percent of the educators indicated that individual counseling is a service currently being offered to children experiencing parental divorce. Parent or social service respondents, however, were less likely to perceive individual counseling as highly available for the children.

With respect to support groups, social service professionals are familiar with support groups in schools and have worked with some schools to facilitate the implementation of such support groups for children experiencing divorce. This may account for their perception that support groups are available in schools compared to the other two respondent groups.

These responses indicate differences as to what each respondent group sees as being currently available in schools to help children experiencing parental divorce. More

than 60% of parents and social service professionals indicated that talking with the teacher is available to children experiencing parental divorce, while only 49% of educators agreed. Only 24% of parents and social service professionals agreed that individual counseling is currently available in contrast to the 51% of educators who reported such availability. More than 40% of educators and social service professionals indicated that special attention from the teacher is provided, while only 27% of parents responding felt so. Overall, these differences reinforce the data suggesting that the school currently possesses limited ability to support children.

Each interviewee was asked to describe the school's response in a personal and/or professional experience that each respondent had with a child experiencing parental divorce. This question was designed to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the services currently available in schools for these children and what might be important to incorporate in a school support system.

One parent indicated that the school did not know and would not have known that the family was experiencing divorce from the way her children acted and participated in school. This parent made a point to tell the school of the family situation; then the school, a Christian school, offered assistance to this newly single parent. The school offered assistance with child-care while she attended night classes in order to enter the work force. The parent predicted that this type of support was offered only because the school was affiliated with a church and that public schools do not often know their students and families well enough to know what type of support to provide. Public schools, according to this parent, are less personalized to the needs of families than their counterpart

Christian schools and therefore do not offer the family services most needed at the time of parental divorce.

One social service professional remarked that a school with which she is familiar offers a support group for children experiencing parental divorce. This school sends a flyer to each parent known to be experiencing divorce, inviting the children to become involved in the support group. She indicated that participation in a support group was not to be expected of all children but was considered for children on an individual basis. Parents were well informed of the goals and objectives of such a program. Another social service professional recalled the special attention given to her by teachers while her family experienced divorce when she was an elementary school age child. She recounted the value of the understanding and support given to her by teachers when she began stuttering as an elementary school age child from the stress she was experiencing from her family situation. This social service professional indicated that a school with which she is familiar offers counseling services at the elementary school level to children experiencing parental divorce. The social service professional stated that unfortunately there are some parents who will not allow their children to accept the minimal services currently available in schools, nor will they accept the school's referral of a child to an outside agency for more in-depth services. She further indicated that this school does a good job of observing children, and the counselor does a good job contacting parents to determine where assistance may be desired.

School support persons interviewed report a contrasting story. School support persons are individuals working within the school setting in non-teaching assignments. Included in this category are school counselors, school secretaries, cafeteria workers,

educational assistants, and custodians. For this study, two school support persons working with and having experience in working with children experiencing parental divorce were chosen to participate. One support person reported that the most the school does in the event of parental divorce is ask for official custody papers and who will be responsible for the child. She reported that school personnel involved with a particular child— teachers, support personnel, and administrators—will do their best to assist the child in any way possible to cope with the trauma of parental divorce, but there are no organized efforts or services offered by the school. Another school support person indicated that the school secretary is a vital source of information about children experiencing parental divorce and is a vital link between the child and school counselor.

One of the educators interviewed noted that as a teacher she feels it is important to understand the child's family situation. She stressed the importance of the teacher knowing, or being informed about the following: which parent has custody of the child, how visitations occur with the non-custodial parent, and who may pick up the child from school. She indicated that the school, and teachers in particular, refer children experiencing parental divorce to the school counselor. She further indicated that she has observed school personnel being willing to listen to children, thus helping them cope with divorce. This educator sees the school as very supportive of these children experiencing parental divorce.

Another educator reported that a school with which he was familiar was not as observant and supportive of a child who he knew was experiencing parental divorce. In this case the school did not try to uncover the big picture of what was causing the child to

behave and act the way he was; this negligence resulted in the child perhaps inappropriately repeating a grade at the elementary school level.

### The Role of the School when a Family Dissolves

What role should the school play, if any, in providing support or services to children experiencing parental divorce is the main research question for this study. To answer this question respondents were asked what they think schools could do to provide the best possible supports and services to elementary school-age children experiencing parental divorce. Respondents were also queried regarding what supports and services would represent those that would be most effective in meeting the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce as well as those most appropriate response of a school interested in meeting the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce.

The variation in how schools respond or variation in perceptions about the services available in schools, may suggest the lack of a clear or commonly accepted role for schools in this situation. Respondents were surveyed to determine whether there might be agreement today about whether or not schools should have a role. Ninety-five percent of the respondents agreed that there is a role for the elementary school when a family experiences divorce. Table 6 summarizes respondent's agreement.

Table 6

#### Respondent Feels that There is a Role for the Elementary School when Families Experience Divorce

| Group              | Number | Percent |
|--------------------|--------|---------|
| Parents            | 11     | 100     |
| Educators          | 27     | 96      |
| S.S. Professionals | 23     | 92      |
| Total              | 61     | 95      |

All interviewees agreed that there is a definite role for the school in the event of parental divorce. One parent feels that school is a place where children spend a great deal of time and therefore it should be a place in which children find support in times of personal crisis. This supportive role can occur through in-school support groups and counseling sessions for children, as well as in support groups for single parents desiring to better understand and work with their children. This was echoed by another parent who felt that teachers hold a key role in working with children experiencing parental divorce. This parent feels that teachers are in a position to know a child quite well over the course of a school year and should take the time to do so. The teacher, according to this parent, could be the vital link between the child and the family in helping the parents understand his/her specific needs during and after the divorce.

Social service professionals agreed with parent interviewees in that they feel that the school is a place where children feel comfortable and safe. Social service professionals remarked that children spend a great deal of time in schools on a daily basis. "Schools become the perfect place to observe children and to initially determine their needs in the event of parental divorce," stated one social service professional. This does not mean that schools are always the best place to provide services to these children, but they may be best place to make referrals. Social service professionals stated that without referral by the school to an outside agency, a family may not receive the supports and services needed at the time of divorce. They felt that for this reason collaboration between schools and outside agencies may be beneficial in order to provide the necessary supports and services for these families within the school setting. One respondent highly recommended that school counselors work closely with outside agencies to know what is

available in the community and to establish ways that schools and social service agencies can collaborate in the area of service delivery. Another social service professional sees the elementary school as a bridge between the child and the outside world in that the elementary school can become a clearing-house of information and services for families and children. "Since elementary schools by their very nature are family oriented institutions it makes sense that families might feel comfortable if the school interceded in their time of need to facilitate obtaining the best possible services to meet their needs as they experience divorce."

School support personnel indicated that they feel the school needs to assume a social service role in times of parental divorce. This means that schools need to make speedy referrals to counselors who work on site to serve children and families experiencing divorce. Schools need to make it their business to know which children are experiencing divorce and need to take action accordingly. This interviewee also feels that it is necessary for counselors to be available to parents and other family members who may need assistance in working with children experiencing divorce. Unfortunately, counselors are not often readily available in schools to meet these needs. Another school support professional agreed that the most important role of the school is one of facilitation. Schools need to work with the parents experiencing difficulty in marriage to resolve conflicts involving the children and need to work with children to understand and cope with the family crises they are experiencing at home. According to one school support person, schools are the key in hooking children and families up with services they may desperately need.

Educators responding feel that they are key in observing children at times when parents caught up in the divorce process may be unable to do so. One respondent said that she feels that “a child’s academic progress and mental state go hand in hand and that academic progress may be dependent on a child’s mental state.” Therefore, the teacher needs to be able to make judgments about the needs of children and be able to communicate those needs to parents and other school personnel—the first leg of the facilitation process to obtain the services needed by children experiencing divorce. Another educator feels that the school needs to be a supportive place for children to feel safe and to begin to be able to talk about what is happening in his/her life at the time of parental divorce. The teacher is the one, according to this respondent, who should be able to first pick up on a child’s behavior changes and should be able to refer the child for appropriate services to meet his/her needs.

Given that there is substantial agreement among different groups that the school should play a role in supporting children through the problems associated with parental divorce, it is important to see if there is also appreciable agreement regarding what services are effective in meeting the needs of children. This question is addressed next.

#### Effective Services for Children

The literature identified a number of services which would be effective in working with children experiencing parental divorce. Included as effective services are the provision of support through structure and daily routine, counseling and support groups, group counseling, and nurturance (Ackerman, 1997; Frieman, 1994; Hammond, 1979; Miller & Cherry, 1991; Pfeifer & Abrams, 1984; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Survey respondents in this study rated the effectiveness of these strategies on a five point scale



from very effective (1) to very ineffective (5). Ratings are reported using mean scores for each group in Table 7. The differences between the mean scores among the three groups are analyzed using ANOVA to determine if there are any significant differences among responses when comparing groups. Table 7 also reports ANOVA results.

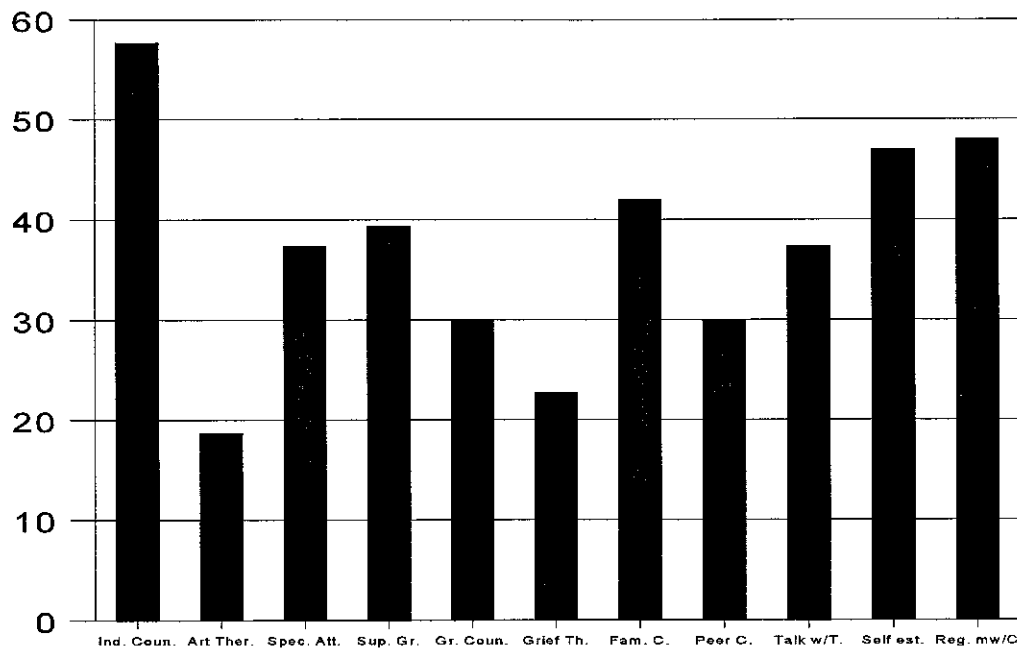
Table 7  
Analysis of Variance of Perceived Effective Supports in Working with Children of Divorce

| Support/Group                  | Parents | Educators | S.S. Professionals | F     |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|-------|
| Individual Counseling          |         |           |                    | 1.114 |
| Mean                           | 1.3     | 1.86      | 1.96               |       |
| S.D.                           | .483    | 1.41      | 1.12               |       |
| N                              | 10      | 28        | 24                 |       |
| Art Therapy                    |         |           |                    | 2.131 |
| Mean                           | 2.0     | 2.5       | 2.09               |       |
| S.D.                           | .667    | .761      | .793               |       |
| N                              | 10      | 20        | 23                 |       |
| Special Attention from Teacher |         |           |                    | .922  |
| Mean                           | 1.7     | 2.2       | 2.08               |       |
| S.D.                           | .68     | 1.15      | 1.02               |       |
| N                              | 10      | 27        | 24                 |       |
| Support Group                  |         |           |                    | .861  |
| Mean                           | 1.67    | 2.17      | 1.84               |       |
| S.D.                           | .50     | 1.31      | 1.07               |       |
| N                              | 9       | 24        | 25                 |       |
| Group Counseling               |         |           |                    | .619  |
| Mean                           | 2.0     | 2.30      | 1.96               |       |
| S.D.                           | .87     | 1.29      | .98                |       |
| N                              | 9       | 23        | 23                 |       |
| Grief Therapy                  |         |           |                    | 1.792 |
| Mean                           | 1.88    | 2.65      | 2.29               |       |
| S.D.                           | .64     | 1.27      | .91                |       |
| N                              | 8       | 23        | 24                 |       |
| Family Counseling              |         |           |                    | .414  |
| Mean                           | 1.70    | 2.08      | 2.08               |       |
| S.D.                           | .67     | 1.41      | 1.12               |       |
| N                              | 10      | 26        | 25                 |       |
| Peer Counseling                |         |           |                    | 1.205 |
| Mean                           | 1.70    | 2.29      | 2.21               |       |
| S.D.                           | .67     | 1.30      | .83                |       |
| N                              | 10      | 24        | 24                 |       |
| Talking with Teacher           |         |           |                    | .318  |
| Mean                           | 1.89    | 2.19      | 2.00               |       |
| S.D.                           | .93     | 1.21      | 1.02               |       |
| N                              | 9       | 27        | 24                 |       |
| Self esteem enhancement        |         |           |                    | 1.762 |
| Mean                           | 1.33    | 2.12      | 2.00               |       |
| S.D.                           | .50     | 1.37      | .88                |       |
| N                              | 9       | 26        | 24                 |       |
| Meetings w/ Counselor          |         |           |                    | 2.303 |
| Mean                           | 1.33    | 1.92      | 2.24               |       |
| S.D.                           | .50     | 1.35      | .93                |       |
| N                              | 9       | 26        | 25                 |       |

\*p<.05

Figure 1 describes graphically the supports perceived as most effective by the combined respondent groups. The information contained in Figure 1 was obtained by averaging the percentages found in the very effective column of each of the three respondent groups (see Table 8).

Figure 1  
Very Effective Supports Perceived by Combined Respondents



As evidenced by Figure 1, individual counseling was perceived as being a very effective support by the greatest number of respondents (57.67%). Next, respondents perceived regular meetings with the counselor (48%) to be a very effective support for children experiencing parental divorce, followed closely by self-esteem enhancement in the classroom (47%). Grief therapy (22.67%) and art therapy (18.67%) were perceived as the least effective supports by combined respondent groups.

The strategy perceived most effective was individual counseling with 57.67 percent of respondents agreeing that it was very effective as a support for schools to provide those children experiencing divorce. The highest rating in this category came from the parents with 70 percent rating individual counseling as very effective, but all groups assigned a high effectiveness. There was no significant difference among the three survey groups ( $F=1.114$ ).

Regular meetings with the counselor was rated as a very effective support by 48 percent of the respondents. The highest ratings for regular meetings with the school counselor as very effective came from parents, 66 percent of whom rated it very effective, followed by educators, 54 percent of whom rated it very effective. There was substantial agreement among the three respondent groups that regular meetings with the school counselor is a very effective support to use with children experiencing parental divorce ( $F=2.303$ ).

Self-esteem enhancement in the classroom as an effective support was rated as very effective by 47 percent of the respondents. Parents rated it highest with 66 percent rating it very effective. There was no significant difference of opinion among the three respondent groups ( $F=1.762$ ).

Table 8 presents crosstabulations of survey results by percentage responding from each group. A crosstabulation table of survey responses by number responding is found in Appendix F.

Table 8  
Crosstabulation of Survey Results by Percentage of Effective Strategies

| Group/Rating                          | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|
| <b>Individual Counseling</b>          |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 70             | 30        | 0       | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 61             | 21        | 4       | 0           | 14               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 42             | 38        | 8       | 8           | 4                |
| <b>Art Therapy</b>                    |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 20             | 60        | 20      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 10             | 35        | 50      | 5           | 0                |
| S.S.Professional                      | 26             | 39        | 35      | 0           | 0                |
| <b>Special Attention from Teacher</b> |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 40             | 50        | 10      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 30             | 37        | 22      | 4           | 7                |
| S.S.Professional                      | 42             | 12        | 42      | 4           | 0                |
| <b>Support Group</b>                  |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 33             | 66        | 0       | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 37             | 33        | 17      | 0           | 13               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 48             | 32        | 12      | 4           | 4                |
| <b>Group Counseling</b>               |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 22             | 66        | 0       | 11          | 0                |
| Educators                             | 34             | 26        | 22      | 9           | 9                |
| S.S.Professional                      | 34             | 44        | 17      | 0           | 5                |
| <b>Grief Therapy</b>                  |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 25             | 62        | 13      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 22             | 22        | 39      | 4           | 13               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 21             | 38        | 33      | 8           | 0                |
| <b>Family Counseling</b>              |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 40             | 50        | 10      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 50             | 23        | 8       | 8           | 11               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 36             | 36        | 16      | 8           | 4                |
| <b>Peer Counseling</b>                |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 40             | 50        | 10      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 33             | 33        | 13      | 13          | 8                |
| S.S.Professional                      | 17             | 54        | 21      | 8           | 0                |
| <b>Talking w/Teacher</b>              |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 44             | 22        | 33      | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 30             | 48        | 4       | 11          | 7                |
| S.S.Professional                      | 38             | 33        | 25      | 0           | 4                |
| <b>Self esteem enhancement</b>        |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 66             | 33        | 0       | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 42             | 34        | 4       | 8           | 12               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 33             | 38        | 25      | 4           | 0                |
| <b>Reg. Meetings w/Counselor</b>      |                |           |         |             |                  |
| Parents                               | 66             | 33        | 0       | 0           | 0                |
| Educators                             | 54             | 27        | 4       | 4           | 11               |
| S.S.Professional                      | 24             | 36        | 32      | 8           | 0                |

See Appendix G for crosstabulation table by numbers responding.

The three groups surveyed demonstrated agreement in their perceptions of the effective supports presented from the literature resulting in no significant statistical difference evidenced by ANOVA results contained in Table 7.

Effective supports may occur more during the pre-divorce stage and during the divorce process, while appropriate services may be offered to children after divorce has occurred. Interview respondents from the three survey groups as well as school support persons interviewed were asked to outline the most effective support for a school to use in working with these children.

One parent responded that groups facilitated by someone who had experience with children and divorce, or was specially trained in working with these children, would be the most effective support for the school to offer. Another parent stated that she feels that the most effective support is to provide a way for the child to talk about the situation. According to this parent, this can occur through talking with a counselor, a staff member, or perhaps through journaling.

According to one social service professional, it would be most effective for schools to take the time to talk to children about their family situations. This professional feels that the time spent talking to the child when he/she needs to talk is the best way to effectively meet the child's need. The child may not be able to focus on school-related responsibilities until the child is able to talk about the family difficulties, making it necessary to remove that barrier before being able to focus on school work. Another social service professional feels that it is vital for a school to provide a counselor for children to be able to talk to about their family situation. She also recommended peer counseling as an effective support for children— especially older children.

One school support person echoed the opinion of the social service professional stating that support groups for children are the most effective support for schools to offer. The idea of peers sharing with peers is appealing to this individual who feels that the group should be facilitated by an adult. Another school support person feels that family counseling is most effective in working with families and children experiencing parental divorce. This staff member also stated that communities, churches, and the school should come together to provide this type of service to these families. From the perspective of this school support person, the most difficult aspect of divorce is that there is always someone, parent or child, who is blamed or feels at fault for what has happened. Family counseling would be an effective way to address these feelings. This respondent has also had experience with couples who have told him that if their marriage doesn't work out they can "always get a divorce." He would like to see more pre-marital counseling occur to address this attitude exhibited by young couples.

One educator indicated that the most effective support is to provide counseling services on site because many parents cannot afford the counseling that they and their children need. This could best be done through a collaboration among schools and community agencies to provide the services needed at a minimal cost to families. Another educator indicated that group counseling is a very effective support for schools to provide. This respondent recommended that children be exposed to education in human relations at the elementary school level, believing that this type of education may serve as a prevention to parental divorce later in life. He sees many children unable to interact with peers in the school setting and feels that this will carry over into later life relationships in marriage and family.

While there was substantial agreement among the parents, educators, and social service professionals regarding the effectiveness of various support strategies, this does not mean that the groups collectively or individually saw the schools as appropriate providers of such services. This is examined in the next section.

### Appropriateness of Services for Children

In the preceding section a number of services were identified which were perceived as very effective in meeting the needs of children experiencing parental divorce. Now the extent to which they are considered appropriate services for schools to provide is examined. Table 9 provides an overview of respondent's perceptions of services appropriate for schools to provide children experiencing parental divorce. Table 9 reports mean scores calculated from the responses to the survey based on ratings ranging from very appropriate (1) to very inappropriate (5). Analysis of Variance is used to determine whether any differences exist among group responses in each area surveyed. Post hoc tests were then conducted to determine whether any of the differences were significant by statistical standards. Significant differences are indicated by an asterisk (\*) next to the F score value in Table 9.

Table 9

Analysis of Variance of Perceived Appropriate Services for Schools to Provide

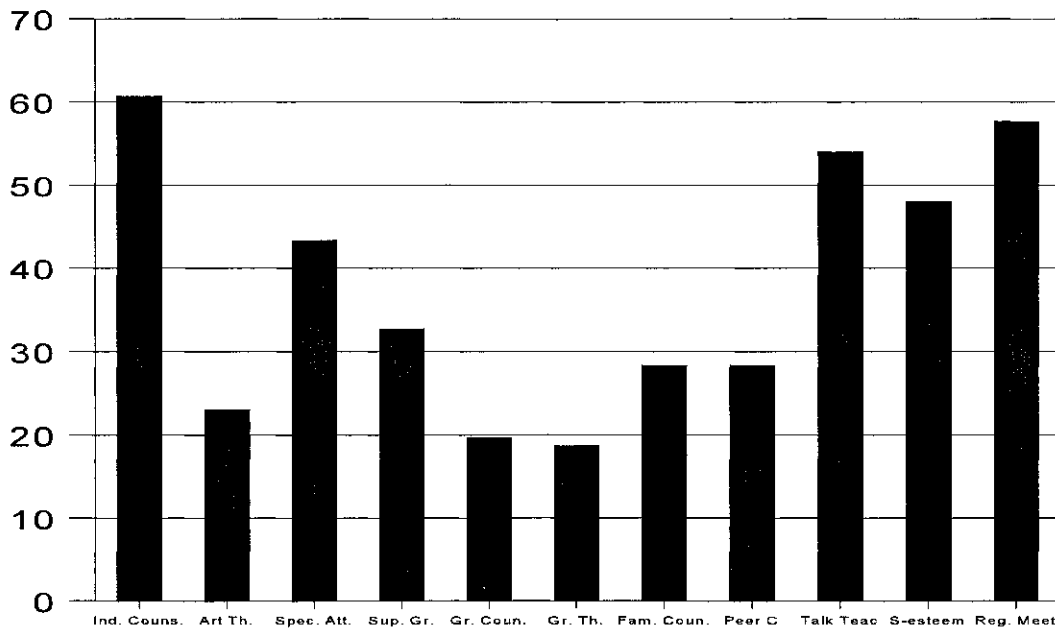
| Support/Group                         | Parents | Educators | S.S. Professionals | F      |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-----------|--------------------|--------|
| <b>Individual Counseling</b>          |         |           |                    | 4.347* |
| Mean                                  | 1.22    | 1.68      | 2.54               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .44     | 1.33      | 1.50               |        |
| N                                     | 9       | 28        | 24                 |        |
| <b>Art Therapy</b>                    |         |           |                    | 1.946  |
| Mean                                  | 1.90    | 2.65      | 2.57               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .74     | 1.06      | 1.17               |        |
| N                                     | 10      | 26        | 21                 |        |
| <b>Special attention from teacher</b> |         |           |                    | .295   |
| Mean                                  | 1.80    | 2.16      | 2.08               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .79     | 1.37      | 1.28               |        |
| N                                     | 10      | 25        | 24                 |        |
| <b>Support Group</b>                  |         |           |                    | .069   |
| Mean                                  | 2.00    | 2.15      | 2.09               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .82     | 1.32      | 1.04               |        |
| N                                     | 10      | 26        | 23                 |        |
| <b>Group Counseling</b>               |         |           |                    | .201   |
| Mean                                  | 2.44    | 2.58      | 2.74               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .88     | 1.39      | 1.25               |        |
| N                                     | 9       | 26        | 23                 |        |
| <b>Grief Therapy</b>                  |         |           |                    | 1.214  |
| Mean                                  | 2.22    | 2.78      | 2.91               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .83     | 1.20      | 1.16               |        |
| N                                     | 9       | 23        | 23                 |        |
| <b>Family Counseling</b>              |         |           |                    | 4.124* |
| Mean                                  | 2.60    | 2.35      | 3.43               |        |
| S.D.                                  | 1.35    | 1.44      | 1.24               |        |
| N                                     | 10      | 26        | 23                 |        |
| <b>Peer Counseling</b>                |         |           |                    | .941   |
| Mean                                  | 1.89    | 2.46      | 2.17               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .78     | 1.32      | .98                |        |
| N                                     | 9       | 24        | 23                 |        |
| <b>Talking with Teacher</b>           |         |           |                    | .227   |
| Mean                                  | 1.64    | 1.88      | 1.75               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .81     | 1.31      | .90                |        |
| N                                     | 11      | 26        | 24                 |        |
| <b>Self esteem enhancement</b>        |         |           |                    | .606   |
| Mean                                  | 1.50    | 1.92      | 1.79               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .53     | 1.26      | .88                |        |
| N                                     | 10      | 25        | 24                 |        |
| <b>Meetings w/ Counselor</b>          |         |           |                    | .483   |
| Mean                                  | 1.56    | 1.72      | 1.96               |        |
| S.D.                                  | .88     | 1.34      | .98                |        |
| N                                     | 9       | 25        | 23                 |        |

\*p&lt;.05



Figure 2 presents graphically the overall most appropriate services to be provided by schools perceived by the combined respondent groups. The information contained in Figure 2 was obtained by averaging the percentages found in the very appropriate column of each of the three respondent groups (see Table 10).

Figure 2  
Very Appropriate Services Perceived by Combined Respondents



As evidenced by Figure 2, combined respondent groups perceived individual counseling (60.67%) to be the most appropriate service schools can provide to children experiencing parental divorce. More than half of the combined respondents (57.67%) also perceived regular meetings with the counselor and talking with the teacher (54%) to be very appropriate for schools to provide. Combined respondent groups perceived group counseling (19.67%) and grief therapy (18.67%) to be least appropriate for provision in schools.

Over half, 60.67 percent of the respondents rated individual counseling as very appropriate for a school to provide. There was a significant disagreement among the groups regarding the appropriateness of school based individual counseling with educators (71%) and parents (78%) most inclined to see individual counseling as very appropriate as compared to social service professionals (33%) ( $F=4.347$ ;  $p<.05$ ).

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents rated regular meetings with the school counselor as a very appropriate service for schools to offer children experiencing parental divorce. Educators with 68 percent, and parents with 66 percent, gave this strategy a very appropriate rating. Very little difference of opinion among the groups was registered ( $F=.483$ ).

Fifty-four percent of the respondents rated talking with the teacher as a very appropriate service for schools to offer. Educators were most likely (57%) to give this strategy a very appropriate rating, with parents in close agreement (55%). There was little disagreement among the groups that talking with the teacher is a very appropriate service for schools to offer children of divorce ( $F=.227$ ).

There was also a significant difference of opinion among the groups of the appropriateness of family counseling to be offered by schools ( $F=4.124$ ;  $p<.05$ ). Forty-six percent of educators indicated that family counseling was very appropriate service to offer children experiencing parental divorce. Fifteen percent of the combined respondents rated family counseling as either an inappropriate or as a very inappropriate service for schools to offer at the time of parental divorce.

Table 10 represents cosstabulations of survey responses by percentage responding to each appropriate strategy.

Table 10  
Crosstabulations of Survey Responses by Percentage for Appropriate Strategies

| Group/Rating                          | Very<br>Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very<br>Inappropriate |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Individual Counseling</b>          |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 78                  | 22          | 0       | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 71                  | 14          | 0       | 4             | 11                    |
| S.S.Professional                      | 33                  | 25          | 13      | 13            | 16                    |
| <b>Art Therapy</b>                    |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 30                  | 50          | 20      | 0             | 10                    |
| Educators                             | 15                  | 27          | 38      | 14            | 5                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 24                  | 19          | 38      | 14            | 5                     |
| <b>Special Attention from Teacher</b> |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 40                  | 40          | 20      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 40                  | 24          | 16      | 8             | 12                    |
| S.S.Professional                      | 50                  | 13          | 20      | 13            | 4                     |
| <b>Support Group</b>                  |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 30                  | 40          | 30      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 38                  | 34          | 12      | 4             | 12                    |
| S.S.Professional                      | 30                  | 43          | 17      | 15            | 5                     |
| <b>Group Counseling</b>               |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 11                  | 44          | 33      | 11            | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 31                  | 19          | 23      | 15            | 12                    |
| S.S.Professional                      | 17                  | 26          | 35      | 9             | 13                    |
| <b>Grief Therapy</b>                  |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 22                  | 33          | 44      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 17                  | 22          | 35      | 17            | 9                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 17                  | 9           | 48      | 17            | 9                     |
| <b>Family Counseling</b>              |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 30                  | 10          | 40      | 10            | 10                    |
| Educators                             | 46                  | 8           | 19      | 19            | 8                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 9                   | 9           | 39      | 17            | 26                    |
| <b>Peer Counseling</b>                |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 33                  | 44          | 22      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 29                  | 29          | 17      | 17            | 8                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 23                  | 52          | 17      | 4             | 4                     |
| <b>Talking w/Teacher</b>              |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 55                  | 27          | 18      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 57                  | 19          | 8       | 8             | 8                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 50                  | 29          | 17      | 4             | 0                     |
| <b>Self esteem enhancement</b>        |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 50                  | 50          | 0       | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 52                  | 24          | 12      | 4             | 8                     |
| S.S.Professional                      | 42                  | 46          | 4       | 8             | 0                     |
| <b>Reg. Meetings w/Counselor</b>      |                     |             |         |               |                       |
| Parents                               | 66                  | 11          | 22      | 0             | 0                     |
| Educators                             | 68                  | 16          | 4       | 0             | 12                    |
| S.S.Professional                      | 39                  | 35          | 17      | 9             | 0                     |

See Appendix G for crosstabulation of survey responses by number responding to each item.

Interviewees were asked to outline their perceptions of what are the most appropriate services a school can provide children experiencing parental divorce. Interviewees had very definite ideas of services which would be appropriate to offer children in schools.

When asked to project the most appropriate service for a school to provide in the event of parental divorce, one parent stated that school personnel providing the opportunity for a child to talk about the family situation. This parent has also found success in having her child talk with the school counselor about divorce related issues. The parent also recommended a support group of some kind in which children could share experiences with other children who are experiencing the same types of things in their family situation. Another parent felt that it would be most appropriate for a school to encourage teachers to be observant of her children to the degree that they would be able to tell if the child is beginning to withdraw from the peer group or demonstrate a change in behavior or grades. This parent wanted teachers to contact her immediately so that she could determine what type of help would be most appropriate for her children to receive either inside or outside the school setting.

Parents responding to the survey reported that a mentoring program would be beneficial to meet children's needs following parental divorce. The lack of counseling services at the elementary school level is perceived as having a negative impact on children who have experienced parental divorce. Parents also stated the importance of caring teachers who are concerned about each child and letting the child know that the teacher is available to listen. Parents feel that each situation must be handled individually and through regular contact with the child by school personnel. One parent indicated that

children experiencing parental divorce are beginning a new phase of their lives and need patience from school staff at this time. She states that children may not stay focused on school work all day and in some cases may become aggressive. According to some parent respondents, a support group for children who are experiencing or have experienced parental divorce would be useful and appropriate in certain cases. All parents responding to this survey stressed the importance of school personnel understanding the differences in a child's behavior and in schoolwork as part of the child's reaction to parental divorce.

Although parents surveyed generally agreed that the school has an important role when a child experiences parental divorce, one parent responding to the survey stated that she did not feel that the school staff should be involved with a child's family situation unless there is a problem occurring in school. This parent feels that a child "is less likely to feel bad about the divorce situation if he/she is not made to believe he/she should feel bad." She also feels that if a child experiences a problem at school, the parents should be notified and would then take appropriate action in the best interest of the child.

One of the social service professionals felt that the most appropriate service for a school to provide is to talk to the children about the family situation. She felt that in some cases a person outside the child's family system is the most appropriate person to talk to a child about divorce. According to this social service professional, the child may benefit from talking to any school personnel—teacher, administrator, or support staff—as long as the person to whom the child talks is someone with whom the child feels a connection. This could be anyone including the school secretary, the custodian, the classroom teacher, or the principal. Another social service professional observed that it is appropriate to offer counseling to children experiencing parental divorce within the school setting. She stated

that many schools do not provide counseling services at the elementary school level, and she is concerned about this lack of services.

Social service professionals surveyed view working in schools with elementary school children experiencing parental divorce in three ways. First, they encourage schools to offer support group and counseling services for children facilitated by both adults familiar with divorce and by peers. Social service professionals surveyed believe that through support groups children will learn that divorce is not the fault of the child and that both parents will continue to love and support them as their child despite the parents being divorced. Social service professionals also felt that through support groups children can gain knowledge of and learn to use the necessary coping skills. Support groups facilitated by peers can provide children with insight and coping skills at all stages of parental divorce. Next, social service professionals feel that counseling is needed to give children the opportunity to talk to someone other than family members about the problems occurring at home. Children having specific and/or extreme difficulties with the parental divorce may be referred by the counselor to an outside agency for more in-depth therapy. Finally, some social service professionals feel that the need for outside assistance would be best determined by a counselor within the school as opposed to a classroom teacher or other school personnel.

The role of the teacher was also emphasized by social service professionals. Several stated that teachers need to understand what the child is feeling while experiencing parental divorce. Teachers should expect children experiencing divorce to act out verbally, physically, and academically. Social service respondents encouraged teachers to work in building a child's self-esteem and to help the child learn to control

his/her responses without letting him/her withdraw from the peer group. They strongly encouraged teachers to be more sensitive to the issue of parental divorce in the classroom as well as not to identify typical family structures as two parent families. According to social service professionals, this can be accomplished by not singling a specific parent out for specific days, i.e. a mother's/father's lunch day.

Finally, social service professionals recommend that schools provide services to adults who are divorced as well as to the children. One respondent encouraged schools to provide information and support to parents through newsletters and by inviting them to school to meet with and share ideas with other divorced parents. The school working closely with parents in the time of divorce was strongly encouraged by another social service professional who stated that parents going through a divorce are often so overwhelmed by their own emotions that the support which can be provided through the school will be of great benefit.

Another perspective presented by one social service professional notes that the best thing a school can do for children experiencing divorce is to always provide the caring and understanding any child needs on a daily basis, not just in time of crisis. This respondent encouraged social service agencies and schools to develop a strong relationship of working together to meet the needs of all children. Another respondent from the social service group felt that schools should become full-service, social service agencies providing parenting, mentoring, counseling, advocacy, and day-care services.

From the perspective of a school support person, support groups are the most appropriate service to offer children experiencing parental divorce at the elementary school level. This staff member felt that children at this age need to know that someone

else their age is going through the same experience and that they need to find out that divorce is not their fault. A support group, according to this school support person, is a safe place where children can share their feelings and concerns. Another school support person felt that family counseling is the most appropriate service for a school to offer. "The school is a neutral ground on which a family can come together to work out their differences," stated this staff member. The school support person stated that the school, perhaps through the school counselor, should establish communication with a family as soon as word is received that a divorce may occur. The counselor could then talk to the family to encourage them to seek family counseling and to consider the needs of the children involved when considering divorce.

One educator interviewed feels that with a divorce rate of 80-90% in her school, a full time counselor should be employed to work with children and families experiencing divorce. This educator stated that the counselor would be able to talk to children individually and would also hold support groups for children to talk to each other about what is happening in their lives. This was echoed by the other educator who agreed that counseling should be made available on a regular basis at the school and that support groups of no more than ten children under the direction of the school counselor should be established to assist children in coping with parental divorce.

Educators surveyed stressed the importance of schools at the elementary school level providing counseling services. In addition, several educators noted a need for a support group to be offered to children of divorce. Also important for some respondents is a support group at the elementary school level specifically designed to enhance a child's self-esteem. Several educators thought these support groups may be most



appropriate as peer groups rather than those led strictly by adults. One educator indicated the need for schools to disseminate information to parents from local social service agencies and churches. Educators also indicated that newsletters to parents addressing the topic of divorce would be beneficial.

One educator stated a need for parent support groups and workshops for parents designed to help them better meet the needs of their child during this time. A common response from all educators was a need for school personnel to be caring, sensitive, and willing to listen to both children and parents experiencing divorce.

There appear to be many similarities between respondents' perceptions and current professional literature in the area of children and divorce. There is strong agreement among respondents that individual counseling is effective and appropriate for elementary school-age children when divorce occurs. Respondents also voiced strong support for special attention from and talking with the teacher as a viable option for schools to employ in working with children experiencing parental divorce. Group counseling was seen by respondents as an effective strategy although not as an appropriate strategy to be offered in the school setting. This was also true of grief therapy and family counseling. Peer counseling, self esteem enhancement, and regular meetings with the school counselor were all seen as effective and appropriate by respondents in this study in agreement with professional literature in the area.

Teacher education in the area of children and divorce is another aspect of working with children in schools addressed in the literature. Respondents in this study felt that faculty are somewhat prepared, with only 2% stating that faculty are prepared to a considerable extent. None of the respondents in this study felt that the school does an

outstanding job of working with elementary school-age children experiencing parental divorce. This appears to be an area about which schools should be concerned.

Very important in the respondent's views, and supported by the literature, is the role of the elementary school teacher in assessing and addressing the needs of children at the elementary school level experiencing divorce. Through keen observance and knowledge of effective supports and appropriate services, according to parents and social service professionals, the teacher appears to be able to dramatically impact the child's experience with divorce. This important fact must not go unrecognized by schools in their quest to meet the needs of this growing population.

### Summary

The return rate for the survey used in this study was 93% for educators, 83% for social service professionals, and 37% for parents; the cumulative return rate for the study was 71%. This chapter reports the demographic data obtained from the survey as well as F test results for the three respondent groups' perceptions of what is most appropriate services and most effective supports for a school to provide elementary school children in the event of parental divorce. Results indicate extensive, moderate, or negligible agreement regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of these strategies among the groups based upon the mean scores. Significance contrasts are also reported.

The following findings are noted from the data:

1. All interviewees agreed that parental divorce impacts a child's behavior and/or achievement at school. Parents indicated that children acted out behaviorally in ways they had not seen before, often becoming verbally aggressive to the remaining parent. Social service professionals remarked that this change in behavior came from a lack of stability

in the child's daily routine caused by an interruption in the family system structure. Social service professionals responding indicated that children can become manipulative of both the custodial and non-custodial parent during and after the parental divorce. School support persons pointed out that there is often a drop in grades evidenced in children experiencing divorce as well as, in many cases, a marked increase in aggressive behavior by the child. A loss of stability or sense of direction was seen by the school support persons in children experiencing divorce. Educators reported that children experiencing divorce may react very differently, often in extremes — from a drastic drop in grades, desire to fight with classmates, and disrespect teachers, to no visible and outward change in school behavior whatsoever.

2. Survey data indicated that the three respondent groups agree that individual counseling, special attention from the teacher, and talking with the teacher is presently available in schools presently for children experiencing parental divorce. It was agreed that three services are generally provided in the event of parental divorce— individual counseling, special attention from the teacher, and talking with the teacher. Parents interviewed see the school as a somewhat sterile environment lacking the ability to offer support to children and families at the time of divorce. This was contrasted to one parent's experience in a Christian school environment at the time of her divorce. Social service professionals described schools which offer support groups for children experiencing parental divorce, as well as counseling services within the school setting for children who need them. These social service professionals noted the importance of an understanding teacher who took time to talk to students experiencing family crises, doing a good job of observing children and their behavior, and calling attention to deviations in

usual behavior and performance exhibited by these children. School support persons did not see the school as being very responsive at the time of parental divorce. One support person indicated that the best a school does at the time of divorce is to track down the appropriate custody papers for office files. Educators reported referring children to school counselors when available as well as instances when colleagues did not attempt to uncover the reason for a child's change in behavior or performance.

3. All interviewees and survey respondents indicated that there is a role for the school in the event of parental divorce. Parents stated that the school is a place in which children spend a great deal of time and therefore they would be comfortable receiving support from the institution in time of crisis. Parents indicated that teachers hold a key role in observing a child's behavior and have a responsibility to report deviations in usual behavior to parents and other school officials for further attention. Social service professionals interviewed see schools as a perfect place to observe children's behaviors and to initially determine their needs for further assistance. These respondents see the school as a bridge to outside agencies to which referrals can and should be made. One respondent encouraged collaboration between educators and social service professionals to improve services to children experiencing the crisis of parental divorce. School support persons indicate that schools should assume a social service role for children at the time of divorce. They recommend that counselors be made available to children and parents being able to facilitate speedy referrals to outside social service agencies to obtain more in-depth assistance to families in crisis. Educators interviewed feel that they play key roles in observing and reporting a child's behavior. Educators feel that they can be of great assistance to parents at the time of divorce in that parents often become too

emotionally caught up in the divorce to realize what is happening to their children.

Teachers feel that the school needs to be a place where children can obtain support as well as a place from which facilitation of additional services can occur to meet the needs of the child.

4. In terms of a most effective support for a school to offer children experiencing parental divorce, respondents agreed with the current professional literature in that each of the suggested strategies would be effective in meeting the needs of children. Individual counseling and regular meetings with the school counselor, closely followed by self-esteem enhancement in the classroom were seen as very effective across respondent groups. Parents felt that support groups facilitated by someone experienced with divorce or specially trained in working with these children would be most beneficial to the children. Parents also felt that school personnel should be open to talking with children about the crisis situation even if it is not a regularly scheduled part of the school day. Social service professionals agreed with parents that children should be able to talk about the crisis situation. This group also recommended counseling services as being effective supports for children, including peer counseling sessions for older elementary school age children. School support persons agreed that support groups would be beneficial for children experiencing divorce. One school support person indicated a strong need for family and even pre-marital counseling to perhaps prevent the large number of divorces evident in the school. Educators felt that counseling services are not always available to the extent they should in schools and are an effective support for children experiencing divorce. One educator indicated a need for human relations education to occur in the

schools to help children built positive relationships with one another which might impact the number of divorces occurring in future generations.

5. There was some disagreement among respondent groups about which services would be appropriate to offer within the school setting. The most significant disagreement among the groups was evident in the areas of individual counseling and family counseling as an appropriate support to be offered in schools for children experiencing parental divorce. Parents and educators were most inclined to see individual counseling as a very appropriate service to offer children as compared to social service professionals. In perceiving family counseling as an appropriate service in schools to children experiencing parental divorce, educators felt this service was very appropriate as compared to parents and social service professionals. Parents reported that teachers should be observant of a child's behavior and should provide a chance to talk about crisis situations. One of the social service professionals agreed with the parent, saying that the school is a stable, safe place for the child, who should be afforded the opportunity to talk to someone with whom he or she feels connected. Another social service professional advocated for support groups in schools. School support persons also stated that support groups would be most appropriate for schools to offer, as would family counseling perhaps in collaboration with other community agencies. Educators see counseling in addition to support groups as being very appropriate for schools to offer at the time of parental divorce.

The next chapter provides a summary, conclusions, recommendations, and avenues for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

## Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Avenues for Further Research

Summary of Study

Because it is projected that nearly one half of all children born today will spend some time in a one-parent family as a result of divorce (Shiono & Quinn, 1994), it is important that schools be able to provide effective supports and appropriate services to meet the needs of these children. A study of the role of the school in providing support or services to children experiencing divorce is timely because, according to United States census data, the population of these children continues to grow, and because there is little information available to schools about providing effective support and appropriate services to meet the specific needs of these children. The purpose of this study is to increase the knowledge that schools can use to determine how to best meet the needs of children experiencing family dissolution resulting from parental divorce.

Census data indicate that over the past two decades, the divorce rate in the United States has increased 250 percent, giving our nation the distinction of having the highest divorce rate in the world. The review of the literature presented an overview of a child's possible responses to parental divorce. Intervention strategies for use with school-age children were discussed, including the role of the teacher in addressing the needs of children experiencing parental divorce, divorce education and the role of the school, counseling for children experiencing parental divorce, and mental health strategies for meeting the needs of these children.

A survey instrument was developed by the researcher to collect recommendations on what the role of the school should be, if any, in providing support or services to

children experiencing parental divorce from parents of elementary school-age children of divorce, educators teaching elementary school-age children, and social service professionals who serve elementary school-age children. Content validity was assured through the review of the instrument by the dissertation committee as well as by pilot trials of the instrument with each of the survey respondent groups.

Demographic and open-ended survey questions were reported as recorded. Survey results were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) procedures performed by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program. Follow-up interviews were conducted with two respondents chosen from each population surveyed in addition to two school support persons not represented by a separate survey respondent group. The groups recommended effective supports and appropriate services for schools to provide children experiencing parental divorce.

#### Conclusions of the Study

Parents, educators, and social service professionals indicated that there can be a dramatic change in a child's behavior at the time of parental divorce. This may be evidenced by the child exhibiting unusually aggressive behavior, showing a drop in grades, or complaining of specific physical symptoms. Respondents note that some children may not show any of the effects of divorce through behavioral changes.

Each group of respondents—parents, educators, and social service professionals—in both surveys and interviews felt that there is a role for the school in the event of parental divorce. According to respondents, the school is a place in which children spend a great deal of time which provides them stability in their lives. With this stability comes a level of comfort, security, and familiarity, making the school an



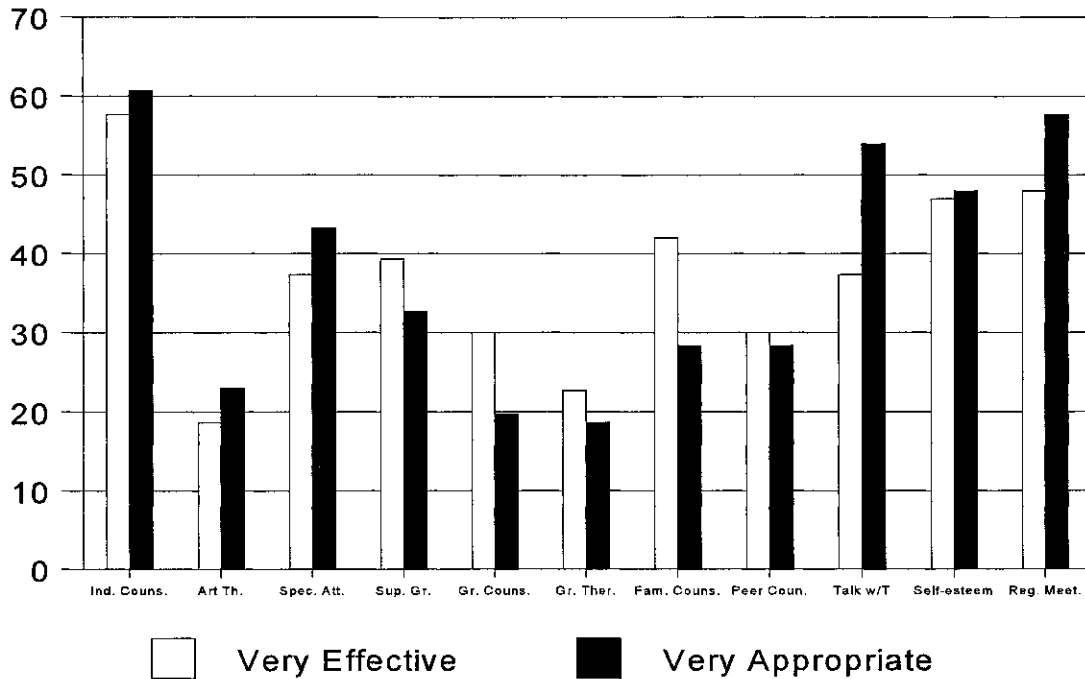
excellent place to offer supports and services to children experiencing parental divorce. Social service professionals, school support persons, and educators challenge schools to work together with community resources available to children experiencing parental divorce in both making referrals to outside agencies and bringing some of the needed services into the school setting. While there may have been a lack of role clarity for schools in the past in providing effective supports and appropriate services for children experiencing parental divorce, new consensus may now be emerging, at least in the Geneva Elementary School community, and perhaps elsewhere as well.

The literature supports as did survey respondents that teachers play a key role in providing effective supports and appropriate services to elementary school children experiencing parental divorce. It appears to be evident that educators do not always receive training in the area of children and divorce as shown in Table 3 in which none of the educators surveyed stated that they were more than only somewhat prepared in this area.

In the area of effective supports and appropriate services schools can provide children experiencing parental divorce, respondents reported some differences in what might be effective in working with children compared to its appropriateness to be offered in schools. Individual counseling is seen by respondents as both effective and appropriate for schools to provide children in the event of a parental divorce. Talking with the teacher is perceived by respondents as something schools can provide although not as highly effective in working with children. Self-esteem enhancement is perceived as being equally effective and appropriate in working with children and regular meetings with the counselor is perceived as more appropriate for schools to provide as compared to

its effectiveness. Figure 3 presents a comparison of the most effective supports and the most appropriate services perceived by respondents.

Figure 3  
Effective Supports and Appropriate Services Compared by Combined Respondents



Parents and social service professionals agree that an effective support for children experiencing parental divorce is to let them talk about their feelings. This can occur by having staff members and school counselors available in schools, or even through journaling, a daily writing exercise teachers can facilitate to help children express their feelings. Parents, social service professionals, and school support persons indicated a need for support groups to be made available in schools as an effective support for children experiencing parental divorce. Educators again stated the need for counseling services, both individual and group, to be made available in schools.

Parents and school support persons note that schools often do not react to a child experiencing parental divorce by offering support or services to the child or family.

Social service professionals report a present use of support groups for children experiencing parental divorce in some schools while educators report that they refer them to the school guidance counselor.

Significant differences in effectiveness ratings were noted, however, with respect to individual counseling and family counseling as appropriate services for schools to offer children experiencing parental divorce, which directly responds to sub-research question 3: What supports and services would represent the most appropriate response of a school interested in meeting the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce? Both educators and parents responding to the survey agreed that individual counseling was a very appropriate service for schools to offer children, while social service professionals were almost evenly divided in their opinions of this service, seeing it as either very appropriate or inappropriate. Scheffe contrasts indicate significantly higher mean scores for social service professionals in this area compared to those of parents and educators.

Forty-six percent of the educators responding to the survey indicated that family counseling was a very appropriate service to provide, while only 9% of the social service professionals and 30% of the parents listed family counseling as a very appropriate service. Social service professionals (39%) and parents (40%) were neutral on the use of family counseling as an appropriate service. Scheffe contrasts show that the mean scores for social service professionals is significantly higher than those of educators.

Parents and social service professionals feel that an appropriate service for schools to offer children experiencing parental divorce include someone within the school, perhaps the classroom teacher, being available to talk to the child about feelings related to divorce, and support groups for these children. School support persons agreed with using

support groups in schools as an appropriate service. School support persons also support the use of family counseling for children and their families. Educators strongly feel that counselors should be made available in schools to meet with children experiencing parental divorce on a regular basis.

### Recommendations of the Study

From the perspectives of parents, educators, and social service professionals, the results of this study of the role of the school when a family dissolves provide some specific ideas for schools, particularly the school considered in this study, to consider in meeting the needs of the growing population of school-age children experiencing parental divorce. This section discusses the recommendations of the study. Because of the single microcosm in the study, the results cannot be generalized but the study does indicate that among those surveyed and interviewed there is a role for the school when a family dissolves and that there are effective supports and appropriate services for schools to offer in helping children cope with parental divorce.

The following recommendations are made:

1. Schools need to be aware that a child is experiencing divorce.
2. It might be beneficial for schools to become familiar with services available in the community to which children and families can be referred.
3. There appears to be a definite need to define a district's philosophy and overall mission to incorporate vision relevant to the needs of the children as explored in the study.

4. School administrators and office personnel need to keep teachers informed about families involved in a divorce since teachers appear to play such a key role in working with the child.

5. Schools need to do their best to keep both natural parents involved with the child's education when there is a divorce.

6. Inservice sessions may be beneficial for teachers to help fine-tune their ability to deliver services to these children.

7. Schools should not overlook social service professionals as valuable resources in the facilitation of support groups within the school setting.

8. Schools might explore the possibility of offering family counseling in collaboration with an outside social service agency within the school setting. A collaboration of services between the school and social service agencies might be accomplished through the establishment of a council of education and social service professionals representing community agencies to meet regularly, perhaps monthly at the school. Through these meetings, to which parents from the school community should be invited, common social issues affecting children of interest to all participating would be discussed and an action plan for change within the community could be developed. It would be very important for the building principal as facilitator of this group to know which social service agencies are available within the community and to encourage involvement of parents in addition to the social service professionals.

9. It seems appropriate that schools re-examine the services they currently have available and perhaps begin to re-define their role within the community in terms of providing effective supports and appropriate services to children.

### Avenues for Further Research

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations for further research are proposed. First, a replication of this study on a larger scale is proposed. This would allow findings from this small sample to be applied to a larger school and community population, increasing the applicability of this study's conclusions for use in schools.

Second, this study has shown that respondents outside the school— parents and social service professionals— are willing to work with the school in providing essential supports and services to children experiencing parental divorce. A study of how schools and community social service agencies could work with parents of children experiencing divorce would be beneficial to provide guidance for schools in implementing collaboration.

Third, a significant disagreement among the three respondent groups— parents, educators, and social service professionals— was reported in the areas of individual counseling and family counseling as appropriate services for schools to offer children experiencing parental divorce. A study of schools currently offering these services including counselors from within and outside the school, as well as family therapists appears to be warranted.

Fourth, an evaluative study of a school implementing the perceived effective supports and appropriate services outlined in this study would be useful in validating the perceptions shared by parents, educators, and social service professionals.

Next, additional research needs to be conducted with divorced male parents, custodial and non-custodial, of elementary school-age children. This becomes evident from the low response from males for this study.

In addition, it would be appropriate to conduct a study of this nature in a school community having a different demographic configuration than that of Geneva Elementary School. This study would be appropriately conducted in a highly affluent or in a middle income level community to provide comparable data.

A valuable study could examine the relationship, if any, between academic test scores, community poverty rate, and single-parent/divorce incidence. This would be especially appropriate in the Geneva Elementary School community where these issues appear to be inter-related.

Finally, there appears to be one group whose voice has not been heard in research on children experiencing parental divorce— the voice of the children themselves. A study is proposed to investigate what children see as the most effective supports and the most appropriate services for a school to provide for them when they are involved in the process of parental divorce. Such a study would fill a significant gap in the literature and would provide schools and community service providers with information from a primary source— the child— the most powerful voice needed to design effective support and appropriate service programs at this critical time in a child's life.

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APPENDIX A  
Survey Instrument

# Youngstown State University

Dept. of Educational Administration, Research and Foundations

**Please check the response that best completes each statement. All survey responses will remain confidential.**

1. My age is:     20-25     26-30     31-35     36-40     41-45  
                    46-50     51-55     56+
  
2. My ethnic background is:     African American     Caucasian     Hispanic  
    Other
  
3. I am             female             male
  
4. I am             single             married             divorced  
    If married, how long?
  
5. I have  children.
  
6. My family was divorced while I was in elementary school.     yes     no
  
7. Someone in my extended family was divorced when their children were elementary school age.     yes     no
  
8. A friend was divorced who had children at the elementary school level.  yes     no
  
9. I feel that there is a role for the elementary school when families dissolve through divorce.     yes     no
  
10. Please explain.

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11. Which of the following services are available for children experiencing divorce at the elementary school level at a school with which you are familiar?

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> individual counseling          | <input type="checkbox"/> support group    | <input type="checkbox"/> family counseling    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> art therapy                    | <input type="checkbox"/> group counseling | <input type="checkbox"/> peer counseling      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> special attention from teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> grief therapy    | <input type="checkbox"/> talking with teacher |

OVER please



Survey — Page 2

Other Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

12. To what extent are the faculty schools with which you have worked prepared to address the needs of children who are experiencing or have experienced divorce?

\_\_\_\_\_ quite a bit      \_\_\_\_\_ somewhat      \_\_\_\_\_ not at all      \_\_\_\_\_ don't know

13. Please rate the following strategies below based on what you see as **being most effective** for addressing the needs of children who are experiencing or have experienced divorce. (1=VERY EFFECTIVE, 5= VERY INEFFECTIVE, 3= neither effective or ineffective.)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Individual counseling                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Art therapy                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Special attention from teacher         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Support group                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Group counseling                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Grief therapy                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Family counseling                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Peer counseling                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j. Talking with teacher                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| k. Self esteem enhancement in classroom   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l. Regular meetings with school counselor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| m. Other: _____                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

14. Please rate the following strategies below based on what you see as **being most appropriate for a school to provide** a child experiencing divorce. (1= VERY APPROPRIATE, 5= VERY INAPPROPRIATE, 3= neither appropriate or inappropriate.)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Individual counseling                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Art therapy                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Special attention from teacher         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Support group                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Group counseling                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Grief therapy                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Family counseling                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Peer counseling                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j. Talking with teacher                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| k. Self esteem enhancement in classroom   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l. Regular meetings with school counselor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| m. Other: _____                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

CONTINUE to page 3

Survey — Page 3

15. What do you think the schools with which you have worked could do to provide the best possible services to children experiencing divorce? (Please explain in detail.)

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16. How would you rate the schools with which you have worked ability to work with children experiencing divorce?

Outstanding     Good     Fair     Poor     Don't know

16. Would you be available for an additional in person or telephone interview on this topic?

Yes     No

If so, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone Number

***Thank you for your responses!!***

**APPENDIX B**  
**Human Subjects Research Committee Approval**



Youngstown State University / One University Plaza / Youngstown, Ohio 44555-0001

August 11, 1998

Mr. John M. Spiesman  
c/o Dr. Linda Wesson, Advisor  
Department of Educational Administration,  
Research, and Foundations  
UNIVERSITY

RE: HSRC Protocol #07-99

Dear Mr. Spiesman:

The Human Subjects Research Committee has reviewed your protocol, "The Role of the School When a Family Dissolves: Perceptions of Social Service Professionals, Educators, and Parents," (HSRC# 07-99), and determined that it is exempt from review based on a DHHS Category 2 exemption.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee and may not be initiated without HSRC approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the Human Subjects Research Committee.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Rando  
Program Co-chair  
Human Subjects Research Committee

cc

c: Dr. Linda Wesson, Chair  
Department of Educational Administration,  
Research, and Foundations  
File



APPENDIX C  
Survey Cover Letter

August, 1998

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am conducting a study to determine the role of the school in the event of a family dissolution through divorce. In this study, I am most interested in the perspectives of parents, educators, and social service professionals in the Geneva Schools community.

As part of this study, I ask you to complete and return to me the enclosed survey as soon as possible. All survey responses will remain completely confidential. No information from your survey responses will be released in any form. Survey data will be compiled and reported in the final study report so readers have no knowledge of survey respondents.

Please consider making yourself available for a follow-up interview in person, or on the telephone after completing the survey. There is a place on the survey to indicate your availability to participate in a follow-up interview for this study.

All interview sessions will be kept informal. Through the interview, you will have the opportunity to provide insight to me in helping our school provide the best possible services to students who have experienced, or are currently experiencing divorce. Those interviewed will remain anonymous — no one will be able to identify you when the results of this study are recorded and published.

Your participation in this study is totally voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without consequence throughout the study. If you wish to withdraw, simply contact me at Geneva Elementary School, (440)466-4831, ext. 151, at any time.

Please feel free to contact me (John Spiesman, Principal, Geneva Elementary School), at (440) 466-4831, ext. 151, if you have any questions about participation in this study.

Thank you for your assistance and participation in this study!!

Sincerely,

John Spiesman,  
Principal, Geneva Elementary School  
Doctoral Candidate  
Youngstown State University

I have received the description of the study, **The role of the school when a family dissolves: Perceptions of social service professionals, educators, and parents**, and agree to participate further by being interviewed by the principal researcher, John Spiesman. I understand what I must do, and want to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D  
Follow-up Letter



January, 1999

Dear

Approximately two weeks ago I mailed you a survey asking you what would be best for a school do to when a child experiences divorce in his/her family.

If you have already returned this survey, I sincerely thank you for your help in this project.

If you have not yet returned this survey to me, please consider doing so as soon as possible. Your input is very valuable to this study, and I would appreciate your help. I have enclosed another copy of the survey which I would appreciate being returned in the self-addressed stamped envelope as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about this project, please do not hesitate to contact me at Geneva Elementary School (119 S. Eagle St., Geneva, 44041, or by telephone (440)466-4831, ext. 151) at any time.

Thank you SO MUCH for your help in making this project a success!!!

Sincerely,

John Spiesman, Principal  
Geneva Elementary School  
Doctoral Candidate  
Youngstown State University

Enclosure  
js

APPENDIX E  
General Interview Questions

### General Interview Questions

1. To what extent does a divorce impact a child's behavior and/or achievement at school?
2. What was the school's response in a personal and/or professional experience you have had with a child experiencing parental divorce?
3. What is the most appropriate response of a school in the event of parental divorce?
4. What is most effective for a school to do in order to meet the needs of a child experiencing parental divorce?
5. What is the role of the school when a family dissolves as a result of parental divorce?

APPENDIX F  
Crosstabulations of Survey Data by Number Responding

Individual Counseling Crosstabulation of Survey Responses

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 7              | 3         |         |             |                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 17             | 6         | 1       |             | 4                | 28    |
| S.S. Prof. | 10             | 9         | 2       | 2           | 1                | 24    |
| Total      | 34             | 18        | 3       | 2           | 5                | 62    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 7                | 2           |         |               |                    | 9     |
| Educators  | 20               | 4           |         | 1             | 3                  | 28    |
| S.S. Prof. | 8                | 6           | 3       | 3             | 4                  | 24    |
| Total      | 35               | 12          | 3       | 4             | 7                  | 61    |

Art Therapy Crosstabulation of Survey Responses

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 2              | 6         | 2       |             |                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 2              | 7         | 10      | 1           |                  | 20    |
| S.S. Prof. | 6              | 9         | 8       |             |                  | 23    |
| Total      | 10             | 22        | 20      | 1           |                  | 53    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 3                | 5           | 2       |               | 1                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 4                | 7           | 10      | 4             | 1                  | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 5                | 4           | 8       | 3             | 1                  | 21    |
| Total      | 12               | 16          | 20      | 7             | 2                  | 57    |

Special Attention from Teacher Crosstabulation of Survey Results

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 4              | 5         | 1       |             |                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 8              | 10        | 6       | 1           | 2                | 27    |
| S.S. Prof. | 10             | 3         | 10      | 1           |                  | 24    |
| Total      | 22             | 18        | 17      | 2           | 2                | 61    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 4                | 4           | 2       |               |                    | 10    |
| Educators  | 11               | 6           | 4       | 2             | 3                  | 25    |
| S.S. Prof. | 12               | 3           | 5       | 3             | 1                  | 24    |
| Total      | 27               | 13          | 11      | 4             | 4                  | 59    |

Support Group Crosstabulation of Survey Results

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 3              | 6         |         |             |                  | 9     |
| Educators  | 9              | 8         | 4       |             | 3                | 24    |
| S.S. Prof. | 12             | 8         | 3       | 1           | 1                | 25    |
| Total      | 24             | 22        | 7       | 1           | 4                | 58    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 3                | 4           | 3       |               |                    | 10    |
| Educators  | 10               | 9           | 3       | 1             | 3                  | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 7                | 10          | 4       | 1             | 1                  | 23    |
| Total      | 20               | 23          | 10      | 2             | 4                  | 59    |

Group Counseling Crosstabulation of Survey Results

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 2              | 6         |         | 1           |                  | 9     |
| Educators  | 8              | 6         | 5       | 2           | 2                | 23    |
| S.S. Prof. | 8              | 10        | 4       |             | 1                | 23    |
| Total      | 18             | 22        | 9       | 3           | 3                | 55    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 1                | 4           | 3       | 1             |                    | 9     |
| Educators  | 8                | 5           | 6       | 4             | 3                  | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 4                | 6           | 8       | 2             | 3                  | 23    |
| Total      | 13               | 15          | 17      | 7             | 6                  | 58    |

Grief Therapy Crosstabulation of Survey Results

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 2              | 5         | 1       |             |                  | 8     |
| Educators  | 5              | 5         | 9       | 1           | 3                | 23    |
| S.S. Prof. | 5              | 9         | 8       | 2           |                  | 24    |
| Total      | 12             | 19        | 18      | 3           | 3                | 55    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 2                | 3           | 4       |               |                    | 9     |
| Educators  | 4                | 5           | 8       | 4             | 2                  | 23    |
| S.S. Prof. | 4                | 2           | 11      | 4             | 2                  | 23    |
| Total      | 10               | 10          | 23      | 8             | 4                  | 55    |

Family Counseling Crosstabulation of Survey Data

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 4              | 5         | 1       |             |                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 13             | 6         | 2       | 2           | 3                | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 9              | 9         | 4       | 2           | 1                | 25    |
| Total      | 26             | 20        | 7       | 4           | 4                | 61    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 3                | 1           | 4       | 1             | 1                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 12               | 2           | 5       | 5             | 2                  | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 2                | 2           | 9       | 4             | 6                  | 23    |
| Total      | 17               | 5           | 18      | 10            | 9                  | 59    |

Peer Counseling Crosstabulation of Survey Data

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 4              | 5         | 1       |             |                  | 10    |
| Educators  | 8              | 8         | 3       | 3           | 2                | 24    |
| S.S. Prof. | 4              | 13        | 5       | 2           |                  | 24    |
| Total      | 16             | 26        | 9       | 5           | 2                | 58    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 3                | 4           | 2       |               |                    | 9     |
| Educators  | 7                | 7           | 4       | 4             | 2                  | 24    |
| S.S. Prof. | 5                | 12          | 4       | 1             | 1                  | 23    |
| Total      | 15               | 23          | 10      | 5             | 3                  | 56    |



Talking with the Teacher Crosstabulation of Survey Data

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 4              | 2         | 3       |             |                  | 9     |
| Educators  | 8              | 13        | 1       | 3           | 2                | 27    |
| S.S. Prof. | 9              | 8         | 6       |             | 1                | 24    |
| Total      | 21             | 23        | 10      | 3           | 3                | 60    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 6                | 3           | 2       |               |                    | 11    |
| Educators  | 15               | 5           | 2       | 2             | 2                  | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 12               | 7           | 4       | 1             |                    | 24    |
| Total      | 33               | 15          | 8       | 3             | 2                  | 61    |

Self Esteem Enhancement Crosstabulation of Survey Data

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 6              | 3         |         |             |                  | 9     |
| Educators  | 11             | 9         | 1       | 2           | 3                | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 8              | 9         | 6       | 1           |                  | 24    |
| Total      | 25             | 21        | 7       | 3           | 3                | 60    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 5                | 5           |         |               |                    | 10    |
| Educators  | 13               | 6           | 3       | 1             | 2                  | 25    |
| S.S. Prof. | 10               | 11          | 1       | 2             |                    | 24    |
| Total      | 28               | 22          | 4       | 3             | 2                  | 59    |

Regular Meetings with School Counselor Crosstabulation of Survey Data

| Group      | Very Effective | Effective | Neutral | Ineffective | Very Ineffective | Total |
|------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------|------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 6              | 3         |         |             |                  | 9     |
| Educators  | 14             | 7         | 1       | 1           | 3                | 26    |
| S.S. Prof. | 6              | 9         | 8       | 2           |                  | 25    |
| Total      | 26             | 19        | 9       | 3           | 3                | 60    |

| Group      | Very Appropriate | Appropriate | Neutral | Inappropriate | Very Inappropriate | Total |
|------------|------------------|-------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|-------|
| Parents    | 6                | 1           | 2       |               |                    | 9     |
| Educators  | 17               | 4           | 1       |               | 3                  | 25    |
| S.S. Prof. | 9                | 8           | 4       | 2             |                    | 23    |
| Total      | 32               | 13          | 7       | 2             | 3                  | 57    |