

NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER

CHANGING THE FACE OF CHILD MENTAL HEALTH

APRIL 2005

This monthly newsletter provides parenting and mental health information as well as upcoming events and programs by the NYU Child Study Center.

ASK THE EXPERT: PROTECTING CHILDREN DURING DIVORCE

Richard Oberfield, M.D., Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the NYU School of Medicine answers frequently asked questions about protecting children during separation and divorce.

Q: How common is divorce in families with children?

A: We know that between 40% and 50% of marriages end in divorce, and a sizable number of these broken marriages involve children. More than 1 million children each year experience parental divorce each year in the United States.

Q: What are some signs that a child may be having trouble coping with their parents' separation or divorce?

A: Although the majority of children adapt fairly well over time to the parental divorce, about 25% show signs of adjustment difficulties. In the youngest age group (toddler and preschool), affected children often display bewilderment, regression of skills previously mastered such as sleeping alone and toilet training, clinging behavior and separation difficulties. In the school age group, children may demonstrate more open sadness and grieving, as well as marked anxiety and nightmares about their lives and the family. Furthermore, their schoolwork and peer interaction may be negatively affected. Adolescents may show anger, excessive alienation from the parents, unusual rebellious behavior, may withdraw from

friends and activities, or may start to excessively worry about their parents.

Q: What are some things parents can do to ease their child's stress during separation or divorce?

A: The most important step the parents can take to ease the situation for their children is to plan their approach jointly. They should discuss together how and what to tell the children about the separation, and should discuss with them in a clear and straightforward manner how their lives are going to be altered. The schools and other agencies

involved with the children should be informed, and asked to keep lines of communication open with the parents about any changes in the children.

Children should be reassured not to blame themselves for the separation. They should also be told that the situation is sad and upsetting for everyone but that their parents still love them and will stay involved in their lives. As much as possible, family rituals and structure should be maintained as before the separation.

It is very important for parents to not:

- say negative things about each other to the children
- relay messages through the children



- treat a child or adolescent like a confidant or peer
- ask the children to take sides in the disputes

Q: What divorce counseling services does the Child Study Center offer for families?

A: The Family Studies Program at the Child Study Center offers evaluation and ongoing treatment for families experiencing separation and divorce. The services provided encompass issues of co-parenting and stepfamily relationships. In addition, an evening panel discussion entitled "Protecting Your Children

In addition to our clinical services for children and adolescents, the Center offers a variety of programs and services for parents, educators and mental health professionals:

- Getting a Good Start: Learn how to make the most of your child's early mental growth. This seminar will advise you how to optimize the capacity of your child's cognitive and emotional development. You will find out clues to interpreting your child's temperament as well as learning how to tune into your child. Learn how to set the best schedule for you and your baby. The first twelve months of life will be covered. To register, contact Jennifer Gelfand at (212) 263-8861. Next lecture: Wednesday, April 6, 2005.

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- The Sunny and Abe Rosenberg Foundation Lecture Series: *Advanced Seminars for School Professionals*

This series of free professional development seminars will provide school-based practitioners updates on recent advances in children's mental health. To register, e-mail nyuschoolpartnership@med.nyu.edu or call (212) 263-2744. Next lecture: April 13, 2005. See calendar below for details.

- ADHD Institute Family Education Series: This series of workshops is designed to help parents and other family members better understand their child's diagnosis of ADHD and learn more about the most current, evidence-based treatments and interventions. For more information, e-mail ADHD@AboutOurKids.org. See calendar below for upcoming workshop details.
- Protecting Your Children during Separation and Divorce: Contemplating divorce? Learn about your legal options and how to minimize the stress on children during separation and divorce. Presented by the NYU Child Study Center, the Ackerman Institute for the Family and the Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. Monday, April 18, 2005 from 5:30-7:30pm. The event is free, but space is limited. R.S.V.P. to Monique Bowen at (212) 263-8720.

Current Clinical Studies:

- A research study of how teens with and without an anxiety disorder make decisions. If you know an adolescent between the ages of 13 and 17 who might be interested in participating in a brain imaging study using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), please contact Sara Heffton at (212) 263-0661 or sara.heffton@med.nyu.edu. Subjects will be compensated for participation.
- Child and Adolescent Multimodal Treatment Study: This study, sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), evaluates the effectiveness of treatments for children and adolescents with anxiety disorders. We are accepting children and adolescents between 7 and 17 who are currently experiencing symptoms of social anxiety, separation anxiety, and/or generalized anxiety. Children and adolescents with anxiety disorders may experience excessive shyness, nervousness, fear of being away from a parent or caregiver, or excessive worry. Call (212) 263-3651 for more information.

"During Separation and Divorce" is being held at the NYU Child Study Center on Monday, April 18 (5:30 to 7:30 PM) and will include two mental health experts and an attorney. The Ackerman Institute for the Family (212-879-4900) also offers comprehensive services for divorcing families.

For more information about the clinical services at the NYU Child Study Center, please call (212) 263-8916.

Events Calendar

Getting a Good Start

When: Wednesday, April 6, 2005

Where: NYU Child Study Center
577 First Avenue

Center

Time: 11:00am-12:30pm

Cost: Free

The Sunny and Abe Rosenberg

8720

Foundation Lecture Series

*Helping Shy Children Get the Most Out
Of Their School Experience*

When: Wednesday, April 13, 2005

services

Where: NYU Medical Center
families

550 First Avenue, Alumni B

Time: 4:15-6:30pm

Cost: Free

ADHD Institute Family Education Series

When: Thursday, April 14, 2005

Protecting Your Children During Separation and Divorce

When: Monday, April 18, 2005

Where: NYU Child Study

577 First Avenue

Time: 5:30-7:30pm

Cost: Free

RSVP: Monique Bowen (212) 263-

Child Study Center Open House

*Talk one-on-one with our faculty and learn
more*

about the research, clinical programs and

for children, adolescents and their

When: Wednesday, April 20, 2005

Where: NYU Child Study Center

577 First Avenue

Time: 4:00-6:00pm

Cost: Free