

MOTHERS' TRAINING - ILLNESS PHASE  
(HRA PROJECT)

SESSION 2: WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF MY CHILDREN?

(Day 1, Afternoon. Two hours in length.)

OBJECTIVES:

1. Mothers will be more comfortable making plans for someone to take care of their children.
2. Mothers will identify reasons for and against making a formal custody plan.
3. Mothers will improve their ability to decide whether it is best for them to keep their children together.
4. Mothers will identify characteristics that they want a guardian or substitute parent to have.
5. Mothers will identify people who might serve as a guardian.
6. Mothers will be able to evaluate candidates and make a tentative choice of custodian.
7. Mothers will identify ways to handle frustration over limited choices.

RATIONALE:

Making arrangements for someone to take care of the children when the mother is too ill or has died is a very sensitive and complex matter which takes time. Custody planning integrates personal, legal, and financial (entitlement) domains. Currently there is confusion in the field about how to mesh effectively these domains in the best interest of the children and custodian. For those reasons the decision was made to introduce the topic early in the session. Support for working on this task can be provided as the sessions continue. Also guardians may be invited to attend parenting sessions.

Making custody arrangements is a sensitive matter because it forces the mother to confront the fact that she will not be alive to care for her children in the near future. It also raise issues around family and extended family relationships, as well as the role of the children's father. Furthermore there is the potential for conflict between mother and adolescent over the choice of the guardian. Disappointments often occur as potential guardians turn down the role and people who make commitments back out.

Session 2 enables the mother to determine whether to keep her family together and to evaluate potential custodians. Session 3 addresses which type of custody arrangement is best. Session 4 deals with implementation of the custody plan through talking with others.

It is assumed that mothers will have a lot of feelings about undertaking this task; therefore, Session 2 deals with feelings and meaning. In it mothers identify where they are in the custody planning and why they might or might not want to develop a formal plan. Session 2 also confronts important issues such as keeping the family together and involving the father. Mothers need to examine what kind of custodian they are looking for and to identify possible candidates in their circle of friends, family, and relatives. Finally a potential custodian is selected.

It needs to be made clear that the main objectives for these sessions relate to enabling the mother to start and complete the process of making custody arrangements. This goal emphasizes decision-making, problem solving, negotiating, self-motivating, and emotional control skills. The more technical aspects, such as filing guardianship papers with the court will be left to legal services which she can receive free from different groups in the city. Also we will provide her with a written resource booklet describing her options and how to implement her choice.

#### PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce the participants and the topic of the session. Review the first session. Give out Strokes. Do a lottery. (10 minutes)
2. Identify feelings and the meaning to them of having to make custody plans. (10 minutes)
3. Examine reasons for and against making a formal plan. (15 minutes)
4. Practice deciding whether to keep her family together. (20 minutes)
5. List the characteristics which each mother is looking for in a guardian. (10 minutes)
6. Identify possible choices for a guardian. (15 minutes)
7. Practice evaluating choices and make a selection. Point out the problem of the "oldest child" as guardian. (20 minutes)
8. Identify ways to deal with frustration over having limited choices. (5 minutes)
9. Explore what to do when stuck in the process and do a relaxation sequence. (5 minutes)
8. End with a between-sessions step to take, a positive saying, and showing appreciation to each other. (10 minutes)

MATERIALS:

Lottery tickets  
Lottery gifts  
Strokes  
Feeling Thermometer  
Legal Resources List  
Family Tree  
Paper and pencils  
Background Information for Evaluating Candidates

Exercise 1: What Is This Session About?  
(10 minutes)

**[The purposes of this exercise are to create familiarity among participants, build group cohesion, cover group process issues, increase self-esteem, and introduce the topic of this session.]**

Welcome back.

I hope you had a pleasant lunch and feel rested.

Even though we have been in sessions together before, I like to start each new session introducing ourselves again and giving each person a chance to tell us something positive about herself.

Please tell us your first name and complete this sentence: "One of my strengths is ....."

For example, you might say "I am Maria, and one of my strengths is my faith in God."

I will start.

My name is ..... and one of my strengths is .....

**HAVE EACH WOMAN INTRODUCE HERSELF, GIVING HER FIRST NAME AND INDICATING WHAT ONE OF HER STRENGTHS IS.**

Thank you. That was great.

It is time for a lottery.

HAND OUT LOTTERY TICKETS. USE THE LOTTERY TO REINFORCE BEHAVIOR.

We do appreciate your getting back from lunch on time and being ready to go.

Please write your name on a lottery ticket and put it in the bowl.

COLLECT TICKETS. MIX THEM UP, AND HAVE SOMEONE DRAW A WINNER.

Will you please draw a ticket.

HAVE SOMEONE DRAW A TICKET, READ OFF THE WINNER'S NAME AND GIVE OUT THE PRIZE.

Here are your Strokes for this afternoon.

GIVE OUT 20 STROKES TO EACH WOMAN.

Remember to use them whenever you want to show someone that you liked what she did or said or anything else - like just her presence here.

Last time we worked on try to see things from the point of view your teenagers, and we identified what they needed to get them through a difficult time in their lives.

This afternoon we are going to start on an area that is essential to taking care of your children.

It can be a painful area to think about as well.

Sessions 2, 3, and 4 are all about making a custody plan for your children.

That means arranging for who will take care of your children in the future.

By the time this workshop is over we want everyone to have a clear, workable custody plan.

That is a critical goal.

Exercise 2: How do I Feel About Making Custody Arrangements?  
(20 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is to express uncomfortable feelings around making a custody plan and to explore what making plans means to the participants. It is assumed that expressing and owning negative feelings and dealing with negative meaning can reduce barriers to making a custody plan.]**

The thought of making arrangements for someone to care for your children in the future can lead to both positive and negative feelings.

If you don't recognize the negative feelings, you can try to avoid them which may lead to doing nothing - which may not be what you want for your children.

I am going to pass out a Feeling Thermometer with different situations on it.

I would like you to indicate how much discomfort you feel in each situation.

HAND OUT THE FEELING THERMOMETER ON CUSTODY PLANNING. READ THE SITUATIONS, PAUSING AFTER EACH ONE WHILE PARTICIPANTS RECORD THEIR TEMPERATURE LEVELS. THE SITUATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. You think about developing a custody plan.
2. You explain to your teenager that you need to find someone who will take care of her or him in the future.
3. You ask someone if she or he will take care of your children in the future.
4. You talk to your teenager's father about having someone else take care of the children.
5. You and your teenager disagree about who the custodian should be.
6. You talk to a lawyer about making a custody plan.
7. You think about your teenager living with someone else in the future.

Is someone willing to share some of the situations that they felt uncomfortable and comfortable about?

ENCOURAGE SHARING. MAKE SURE ALL FEELINGS ARE ACCEPTED.

Are there other situations that you want to add to the list?

ENCOURAGE SHARING.

How do all of you feel right now?

ENCOURAGE SHARING. MAKE SURE ALL FEELINGS ARE ACCEPTED.

What do you say to yourself when you think about making a custody plan?

Like "I wish I didn't have to do this." Or "I can't face the thought of not being with them."

ENCOURAGE SHARING. MAKE SURE ALL THOUGHTS ARE ACCEPTED AND OWNED. GIVE OUT STROKES FOR EXPOSING THEIR FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS.

What does it mean to you that you need to think about a custody plan?

Why might you want to avoid thinking about it?

Is it scary?

Is it depressing?

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION. MAKE SURE YOU COMMUNICATE CLEARLY THAT IT IS OK TO HAVE FEARS, ANXIETY, SADNESS, NEGATIVE THOUGHTS. DON'T ENCOURAGE OTHER MEMBERS TO TRY AND TALK SOMEONE OUT OF THEIR FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS. YOU WANT THESE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS TO COME OUT AND BE OWNED. ASSUME THAT TAKING CONCRETE POSITIVE STEPS WILL OCCUR GRADUALLY ONCE THE NEGATIVE IS EXPOSED.

Obviously you have lots of strong feelings about what must be done to help your children.

These feelings are very natural.

Exercise 3: What Arrangements Have I Made and Why?  
(15 minutes)

**[The purposes of this exercise are to identify where the mothers are in their custody planning and to explore reasons why they might or might not want to develop a formal plan. Putting individual plans on newsprint and analyzing a woman's situation are employed to meet the purpose.]**

Let's first find out what plans you have made.

I will ask each of you to share with the group your plans for who will take care of your children in the future and what arrangement you have made with them.

By arrangement I mean that the person you selected is going to be appointed guardian, or adopt the children, or be a foster parent, or be written into your will or some other set up.

When I ask you for your plan, please describe it briefly so that everyone has a chance to tell us what they are going to do.

ASK EACH MOTHER HER PLAN. FOR THOSE WHO HAVE A PLAN WRITE THE ESSENCE OF IT ON NEWSPRINT AND POST AROUND THE ROOM. GIVE OUT STROKES.

Thank you very much for sharing.

We will refer back to these plans as we go through the next sessions.

Let's look more closely at why you might or might not want to develop a formal plan.

A formal plan is one that has been made legal through the courts.

A formal plan can make you feel more at ease, knowing your child will receive good care and all the financial benefits to which your child is entitled.

What are some other reasons for having a formal plan?

OBTAIN RESPONSES. GIVE OUT STROKES.

Some times a mother may see it differently.

Here is Diane's situation.

Diane has three children: Martin, 16 years old, Bunny 8 years old and Gloria 4 years old.

Martin's father is dead.

Martin does not feel part of Diane's younger family because his dad was different than theirs.

Bunny and Gloria have the same father who lives somewhere in the city.

Bunny and Gloria feel close to each other, but not that close to Martin.

The father physically abused the younger children.

Both have the scars to prove it.

Diane never reported him, and, when they got into fights about it, he beat Diane and once broke her arm.

Finally she took the children and left him.

She has not seen or heard from him since that time.

Diane's grandmother promised to move in with her and take care of the children.

As Diane understands it, to get a guardian appointed by the courts she would have to get her husband's permission.

Diane does not want to apply for a guardian or have a formal plan.

From Diane's point of view, why might she refuse to make a formal plan?

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES. LOOK FOR REASONS SUCH AS THE FOLLOWING: SHE DOESN'T WANT HIM TO FIND OUT WHERE SHE AND THE CHILDREN ARE LIVING. SHE FEARS HE WILL TAKE THE CHILDREN. SHE DOESN'T WANT TO HAVE THE CHILDREN OR HERSELF HURT AGAIN. SHE DOESN'T WANT TO HAVE TO TELL THE COURTS HE ABUSED THEM. IF LEGAL MATTERS ARE BROUGHT UP BY THE MOTHERS, ASK THEM TO BRING THE QUESTION UP AT THE NEXT SESSION ON THE LEGAL ASPECTS OF DIFFERENT OPTIONS.

Those are some very powerful reasons why Diane might not want to have a formal plan.

Diane is right that to develop a formal plan she needs the father's sign off or to prove that he has disappeared and abandoned the family or is unfit to participate.

How much you want to involve the biological father is something any mother has to consider.

Can you think of other situations where the mother might not want to have a formal plan?

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES. DISCUSS. IF NO ONE MENTIONS THEM, BRING UP THESE TWO EXAMPLES: 1) THE MOTHER HAS NOT HAD GOOD EXPERIENCES GETTING PROMPT HELP AND ENTITLEMENTS. SHE IS SICK AND TIRED OF DEALING WITH THE BUREAUCRACY. 2) THE EXTENDED FAMILY BELIEVES THAT THEY CAN TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN. IT WOULD BE AN INSULT TO LOOK FOR HELP FROM OUTSIDERS LIKE THE COURTS.

Thank you for those examples.

We can see from them that even though there are good reasons to have a formal plan, some mothers may have their own personal concerns which lead them to avoid a formal plan.

Only the mother can decide if the risks are worth taking.

But a mother can get help thinking the matter through.

Here is a list of free legal services where you can discuss the risks for you personally of making a formal plan or not making a formal plan.

HAND OUT THE LIST OF FREE LEGAL SERVICES THAT SPECIALIZE IN CUSTODY PLANNING FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH AIDS.

We hope that the time we spend on custody planning today and in the weeks to come will give you the information and experience you need to make a decision that is best for you and your children.

Exercise 4: Should I Keep My Children Together?  
(25 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is to enable mothers to decide if they should keep their children together. Analyzing a mother's circumstances and applying the principles to their own situation is used.]**

One of the most critical questions a mother has to answer is whether to keep her children together when making a custody plan.

How can she make that decision?

Marie has four children: Gregory 2 years old, James 4 years old, Shirley 6 years old, and Charlene 17 years old.

All the children have different fathers.

Charlene has a six month old baby who is HIV positive.

Charlene was living with her aunt but recently moved back home when Marie became ill.

Because Charlene had a different father she does not feel that she is a real part of the younger children's family.

It doesn't seem to matter to the younger children that they had different fathers.

They are close to each other.

James who is 4 years old has asthma, and the rest of the children are in good health.

Shirley is having some learning difficulties in school.

Marie has been working with Shirley to make sure she doesn't get too frustrated with school and lose the desire to attend.

Now that we know Marie's situation, let's see if we can answer some questions about it.

What factors should Marie be considering to help her decide who she is planning for?

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION. TRY TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE ISSUES TO CONSIDER AND NOT ON MAKING THE DECISION AT THIS POINT. AS THE DISCUSSION PROCEEDS, POINT OUT THE FOLLOWING:

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING HOW CLOSE THE CHILDREN ARE TO EACH OTHER,
2. WHETHER THEY FEEL A PART OF THE SAME FAMILY,
3. WHETHER ANY OF THE CHILDREN HAVE SPECIAL MEDICAL OR OTHER NEEDS,
4. WHETHER ANY OF THE CHILDREN ARE OR MIGHT BE HIV POSITIVE,
5. WHETHER BECAUSE THEY ALL HAVE DIFFERENT FATHERS, SOME GRANDPARENTS MIGHT TAKE ONLY THOSE PRODUCED BY THEIR OWN SON.

ALSO ASK IF THERE IS ANY CHILD FOR WHOM THE MOTHER IS NOT PLANNING. AT A GOOD PLACE IN THE DISCUSSION WHEN MANY ISSUES HAVE BEEN RAISED, WRITE SOME OF THEM ON NEWSPRINT:

WHO AM I PLANNING FOR?  
SPECIAL NEEDS  
HIV +  
GRANDPARENTS  
CLOSENESS TO EACH OTHER  
FEELING PART OF THE FAMILY

Those are good things to look for in helping Marie make a decision.

Should Marie try to keep all her children together?

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION. RESPOND POSITIVELY TO REQUESTS FOR MORE INFORMATION. IF THE RECOMMENDATION IS TO KEEP THEM ALL TOGETHER, MAKE SURE THE GROUP HAS CONSIDERED THAT BECAUSE CHARLENE IS HIV POSITIVE SHE MAY NOT BE ACCEPTED AND MAY JEOPARDIZE THE OTHER CHILDREN'S ARRANGEMENT.

Often there is no one right decision, and the choices are frequently difficult.

Now I would like you to share with another group member whether to plan to keep your children all together and how you came to make that decision.

DIVIDE THE GROUP IN PAIRS AND HAVE THEM SHARE THEIR DECISIONS. AFTER A FEW MINUTES, BRING THEM BACK TOGETHER AGAIN.

How much comfort or discomfort did you have discussing the difficult question of keeping the children together?

OBTAIN RESPONSES.

Exercise 5: What Do I Want In a Guardian?  
(10 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is for the mother to develop criteria which she can use in selecting a person to care for her children. The assumption is that having thought about what she wants she will make a better choice. Also this exercise can highlight conflicts between people with pleasant qualities who still may not meet important standards.]**

I would like you to make a list of what qualities you want in a guardian or care taker for your children.

The basic issue is do you trust this person.

WRITE ON NEWSPRINT "TRUST."

There may be some other qualities which the person must have that are very important to you, such as being a religious person.

WRITE "QUALITIES" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Here are few basic questions to ask yourself while making up your list.

First, will this person agree to take on the responsibility?

WRITE "TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Two, even if the person agrees, is he or she likely to actually carry out the job?

WRITE "ACTUALLY DO IT" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Three, if this person did the job, would the children lose any benefits?

WRITE "LOSE BENEFITS" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Example - the person earns too much to get welfare benefits.

Once you have some good people in mind you will need to check with your case manager to make sure that the person you want can get all the benefits to which your children are entitled.

Four, another resource besides money is space.

WRITE "SPACE" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Does this person have enough physical space for your children?

Five, have complaints been made or charges filed against this person for abuse and neglect?

WRITE "ABUSE AND NEGLECT" ON THE NEWSPRINT.

Now go ahead and make your list of what is important to you.

PASS OUT PENCILS AND PAPER.

AFTER FIVE MINUTES HAVE THEM SHARE THEIR LIST WITH THE PERSON SITTING NEXT TO THEM.

Will you please turn to the person next to you and share some of your ideas on the list.

AFTER THE SHARING, ASK THE GROUP FOR SUGGESTIONS. LOOK FOR OTHER ITEMS SUCH AS TRUSTING THE PERSON, PLEASING THE CHILDREN, PLEASING THE JUDGE.

Let's hear some of your ideas.

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES AND DISCUSS.

Exercise 6: What Are My Choices of People?  
(15 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is to identify a large pool of possible candidates for the guardianship position. It is assumed that by looking at a large group some unexpected candidates might appear.]**

I want you to start thinking of people who might be willing to take care of your children.

First we simply want to come up with all kinds of ideas.

To begin please work on filling out your family tree.

HAND OUT THE FAMILY TREE FORM.

You will note on the family tree, that there is a place to list friends also.

There is a family tree for you and a family tree for the father of your children.

If you don't remember the names of people or don't know who the aunts and uncles are, don't worry about it.

Just put down what you can remember.

The family tree can be filled out in a very messy way.

Let me just take a moment and tell you how to do it.

If you wish, only include people who are living because you are looking for a guardian.

Start down on the family tree where you are and write in your brother and sisters.

Move up and write in your parents and their brothers and sisters.

Then write in your cousins.

Move up again and write in your grandparents and their brothers and sisters.

Next write in the living children of your grandparents brothers and sisters.

Then go to the bottom and write in friends of yours.

If you can think of other people you want to include, jot their names on the family tree as well.

FAMILY TREE

WRITE IN NAMES OF LIVING RELATIVES ABOVE THE LETTERS, +, \*, #

+ = brother or sister

GM = grandmother

GF = grandfather

\* = the children of grandparents brothers and sisters

# = cousins

+ + + + GM GF + + + +      + + + + GM GF + + +

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

+ + + + MOTHER

FATHER + + + +

# # # # # # # #

# # # # # # #

+ + YOU + +

FRIENDS

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You have about ten minutes to work on the family tree.

HAVE THEM WORK ON THE FAMILY TREE. STOP AFTER 10 MINUTES.

Now see if you can come up with a list of possible people to check out - people who are good possibilities for taking care of your children.

WAIT FOR THE GROUP TO DEVELOP THEIR LISTS.

Does everyone have at least two names?

OBTAIN RESPONSE.

If there is someone who has no one on her list and you want the group to help out, please let us know.

Exercise 7: How Can I Evaluate If Someone Is A Good Choice?  
(20 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is to improve skills in evaluating candidates who could take care of their children. It is assumed that practicing on examples, using problem solving skills, will enhance skills.]**

Sooner or later you will be faced with a choice: who is the best person to take care of my children?

The goal is to find the best person.

The alternatives are the people on your list.

You use what you want in a guardian as the way to evaluate them.

Now we want to practice making a selection so that when you are ready to do it, you will make a good choice.

I am going to divide the group in half.

Each small group will get a problem to work on.

Then we will come back together and see what you came up with.

Here's the problem.

Felicia is trying to decide which person is best.

Who would you pick?

HAVE THE GROUP DIVIDE IN HALF. A FACILITATOR GOES WITH EACH GROUP. GIVE OUT THE PROBLEM. GO OVER IT WITH THEM TO ASSIST THOSE MEMBERS WHO MIGHT HAVE TROUBLE READING OR UNDERSTANDING. COACH, IF NECESSARY, BUT BASICALLY LET THE GROUP MAKE A CHOICE ON THEIR OWN.

FELICIA'S CHOICE

Felicia has a 13 year old daughter, Camilla. Felicia has decided that she wants to have a court appointed guardian.

Here is what Felicia would prefer:

1. SOMEONE SHE CAN TRUST.
2. SOMEONE WHO WILL BE NICE TO CAMILLA.
3. SOMEONE WHO WILL ACTUALLY CARE FOR HER.
4. SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER ABUSED OR NEGLECTED A CHILD.
5. SOMEONE TO WHOM BENEFITS WILL CONTINUE TO COME.
6. SOMEONE WHO WILL MAKE SURE CAMILLA KEEP TOUCH WITH THEIR COUSINS IN THE BRONX.(FAMILY IS VERY IMPORTANT TO FELICIA.)
7. SOMEONE WHO WILL ENCOURAGE AND HELP CAMILLA GO TO COLLEGE.

Here is Felicia's list.

#### SISTER - ANGELINO

Is 32 years old. Has five young children. Says having one more won't make a big difference. Very loving. Lives in the Bronx. The man Angelino lives with now comes and goes. Felicia doesn't know what he does for a living. He doesn't say much. Felicia trusts her sister but doesn't feel good about her current man. The family receives some public assistance. Angelino's main concern is keeping her kids safe. There's often gun fire in the streets nearby.

#### GRANDMOTHER

Grandmother is Felicia's mother's mother. She is 71 and has arthritis and doesn't get around very well. She lives alone in Manhattan. She is kind and loving, also very tough. She has gone through a lot. For years she worked in a sweat shop sewing dresses.

She lives on a small pension. Grandmother has always told her children and grandchildren that the only way to a better life was to get educated.

#### UNCLE ALVARO

Felicia's uncle lives upstate on a small farm where he works very hard. He is 47 and a bachelor. Felicia doesn't know how much money he makes. He seems not to spend much but not to want anything either. When she used to visit him as a child, he always insisted that she sit on his lap. He gave her lots of kisses. Sometimes at night she would wake up and see him standing in the doorway to her room. When she graduated from high school, he gave her fifty dollars. He doesn't say much, but is always polite. Uncle Alvaro's brothers and their families like to visit him on the farm.

AFTER WORKING ON THE PROBLEM FOR 10 MINUTES BRING THE GROUPS BACK TOGETHER AGAIN AND ASK THEM FOR THEIR CHOICE AND WHY THEY MADE THE SELECTION. THERE IS NO "RIGHT" ANSWER. WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS THE PROCESS OF EVALUATION AND CHOICE.

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I'd like to hear each group tell us who they recommended and why.

HAVE THE GROUPS SHARE.

Was there anything that made it hard to make a decision?

LISTEN TO OBSTACLES AND ADDRESS THEM. FOR EXAMPLE, SOMEONE MIGHT SAY THAT THEY DID NOT HAVE ENOUGH INFORMATION ABOUT EACH PERSON. AGREE THAT HAVING ENOUGH GOOD AND ACCURATE INFORMATION HELPS A PERSON MAKE A BETTER DECISION.

Let's review what you did.

First you had a problem - which person is best?

Then you had a goal - select the best one.

Next you had alternatives - Sister, Grandmother, and Uncle.

There were standards you could use to evaluate each possible choice.

Those standards were what Felicia wanted in a guardian.

You applied the standards to the possible choices and made a selection.

How did going through that process feel to you?

Was it comfortable?

Would you do it again?

ENCOURAGE A DISCUSSION OF PROBLEM-SOLVING AND DECISION-MAKING.

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In a minute I will ask you to think about your own choice, but before I do I want to alert you to a common problem.

In some families the first person who pops into the mother's head to be the guardian is the oldest child - a teenager or twenty year old.

In the last session you explored how it felt to be a teenager.

What do you think are the pluses and minuses of making the oldest child in the family responsible for the other children?

ENCOURAGE A BRIEF DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEMS OF HAVING THE OLDEST CHILD BE THE GUARDIAN.

Now take a few minutes and make a tentative choice from your own list.

ALLOW A FEW MINUTES FOR MAKING A SELECTION. THEN DIVIDE THE GROUP INTO PAIRS.

Please tell your partner who you have chosen and why.

HAVE A FEW MINUTES OF SHARING.

Exercise 8: What Do I Do About So-So Choices?  
(5 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is cope with frustration around limited choices. It is assumed that by eliciting these feelings and brainstorming ways to cope with them, women will increase their frustration tolerance.]**

Let's say I am a mother trying to make a choice between two people.

One person is my close friend June.

She says she will be the guardian, but she can barely control her own three kids.

My brother, Albert will also do it, but he and his wife fight all the time.

He is willing to be the guardian because he is big on the family helping each other and sticking together.

I plan to chose Albert, but I am really frustrated over having such poor choices.

It isn't fair.

How can I deal with my frustration?

How would you deal with the frustration and disappointment?

ENCOURAGE A DISCUSSION AND BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS.

Exercise 9: How Can I Relax After All This Work?

(5 minutes)

**[The purposes of the exercise are to lower the tension level, enabling participants go away feeling good, and to prepare them for getting stuck.]**

Custody planning can be a frustrating business, and it is typical to get stuck at some time.

When that happens, a mother can seek help from another mother who has gone through it, seek assistance from legal services, tell herself that getting stuck is expected and it doesn't mean there is something wrong with her, and try to reduce tension through relaxation.

Do you have other suggestions?

OBTAIN RESPONSES.

Today we have faced an unpleasant thought: "The day will come when I will need someone to take care of my children."

And even with that unpleasant thought you have still had the courage to work on developing a plan to provide for them.

But some of the pain is still there; so let's take a moment and deal with it.

Sit back in your chair and take a deep breath. PAUSE

Close your eyes if you wish. PAUSE

Can you take a couple more deep breaths and slowly let the warm air escape from your body? PAUSE

Let all the tension begin to escape. PAUSE

Be open like a window in summer. LONG PAUSE

Where is the pain? LONG PAUSE

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Where is the pain? PAUSE

Make a cup out of your hand.

Let the pain fill the cup. PAUSE

Now tighten your fist. PAUSE

Tighter.

Tighter.

Feel how intense the pain is. PAUSE

Slowly open your fist. PAUSE

Open it more. PAUSE

Let the pain go. PAUSE

Shake your hand with your fingers spread out and loose.

Shake all the pain out of your fist. PAUSE

See yourself stretched out on a soft bed. PAUSE

In front of an open summer window.

It is warm, but not unpleasant.

A cool breeze moves the curtains and fans your face. PAUSE

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Put your hand on your heart. PAUSE

Feel your heart beating steady and strong. PAUSE

Breathe out slowly. PAUSE

Breathe out slowly. PAUSE

Now yawn and stretch. PAUSE

Yawn and stretch.

I hope you feel refreshed.

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Exercise 10: What is Happening Next Time?  
(15 minutes)

**[The purpose of this exercise is to create group solidarity, build self esteem and create interest in the next training.]**

In today's session we began the process of making a custody plan and in the next session we will continue working on it.

We will get into the different ways to protect your children: appoint a guardian, adoption, foster care.

Between now and the next session I would like you take a step toward the decisions you have to make around a custody plan.

Your goal would be to take that next step before we meet again.

The goal should be realistic, clear, not too much or too little, and easy to see if it has been finished.

Let me give you some examples of steps you might choose to take.

Make another family tree.

Write out a new list of what characteristics you want the custodian to have.

Figure out what you are going to do about involving the father.

Call another woman in the group and discuss with her what your tentative plans are.

Call one of the legal services and set up an appointment to discuss your situation.

Make a list of questions you have about custody and call a legal service to get some answers over the phone.

These are just examples.

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Take a moment and decide on what your goal is.

WAIT A FEW MINUTES AND THEN ASK EACH WOMAN WHAT HER GOAL IS. COACH THEM IF THEY NEED HELP IN COMING UP WITH A GOAL THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA LISTED ABOVE.

Let's go around and have each woman tell us what her goal is.

ENCOURAGE SETTING OF GOALS.

We have saved a few minutes for anyone to bring up something that's on her mind.

Does anyone want to share a concern with the group?

ENCOURAGE FREE TIME SUPPORT OF EACH OTHER.

The next meeting will be on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (time) in \_\_\_\_\_ (location).

As we are getting closer to ending today's session, let's hold hands with the person on either side of you and say together:

"Our spirits are strong. PAUSE. Our hearts are full of love. PAUSE. We draw strength from each other."

Now show your appreciation to each other for being here, for sharing, for the contributions made.

GIVE OUT STROKES TO MOTHERS. MAKE SURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT OUT.

I will see you next time.

THE END OF SESSION 2

August 1995

FEELING THERMOMETER FOR CUSTODY ISSUES

100	VERY UNCOMFORTABLE
90	
80	
70	
60	
50	
40	
30	
20	
10	
0	COMPLETELY COMFORTABLE

SITUATIONS

TEMPERATURE  
READING

1. You think about developing a custody plan.
2. You explain to your teenager that you need to find someone who will take care of her or him in the future.
3. You ask someone if she or he will take care of your children in the future.
4. You talk to your teenager's father about having someone else take care of the children.
5. You and your teenager disagree about who the custodian should be.
6. You talk to a lawyer about making a custody plan.
7. You think about your teenager living with someone else in the future.

August 1995

WHERE TO FIND LEGAL ASSISTANCE  
FOR MOTHERS LIVING WITH AIDS

BROOKLYN LEGAL SERVICES CORP. B

105 Court Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
718-237-5500

GAY MEN'S HEALTH CRISIS (GMHC)

129 West 20th Street  
New York, NY 10011  
212-337-3504

LEGAL ACTION CENTER

153 Waverly Place  
New York, NY 10014  
212-243-1313

LEGAL AID, COMMUNITY LAW OFFICE

230 East 106th Street  
New York, NY 10029  
212-722-2000

MFY LEGAL SERVICES

At P.S.S. 122, 1st Floor  
150 First Avenue  
New York, NY 10009  
212-995-8040

NASSAU LEGAL SERVICE

91 North Franklin Street  
Hempstead, NY 11550  
516-292-8100

FAMILY TREE

WRITE IN NAMES OF LIVING RELATIVES ABOVE THE LETTERS, +, \*, #

+ = brother or sister

GM = grandmother

GF = grandfather

\* = the children of grandparents brothers and sisters

# = cousins

+ + + + GM GF + + + +      + + + + GM GF + + + +

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

+ + + + MOTHER

FATHER + + + +

# # # # # # # #

# # # # # # #

+ + YOU + +

FRIENDS

August 1995

FAMILY TREE

WRITE IN NAMES OF LIVING RELATIVES ABOVE THE LETTERS, +, \*, #

+ = brother or sister

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+ + + + GM GF + + + +      + + + + GM GF + + + +

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

\* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

+ + + + MOTHER

FATHER + + + +

# # # # # # # #

# # # # # # #

+ + YOUR CHILD'S FATHER + +

FRIENDS

August 1995

## FELICIA'S CHOICE

Felicia has a 13 year old daughter, Camilla. Felicia has decided that she wants to have a court appointed guardian.

Here is what Felicia would prefer:

1. SOMEONE SHE CAN TRUST.
2. SOMEONE WHO WILL BE NICE TO CAMILLA.
3. SOMEONE WHO WILL ACTUALLY CARE FOR HER.
4. SOMEONE WHO HAS NEVER ABUSED OR NEGLECTED A CHILD.
5. SOMEONE TO WHOM BENEFITS WILL CONTINUE TO COME.
6. SOMEONE WHO WILL MAKE SURE CAMILLA KEEP TOUCH WITH THEIR COUSINS IN THE BRONX.(FAMILY IS VERY IMPORTANT TO FELICIA.)
7. SOMEONE WHO WILL ENCOURAGE AND HELP CAMILLA GO TO COLLEGE.

Here is Felicia's list.

### SISTER - ANGELINO

Is 32 years old. Has five young children. Says having one more won't make a big difference. Very loving. Lives in the Bronx. The man Angelino lives with now comes and goes. Felicia doesn't know what he does for a living. He doesn't say much. Felicia trusts her sister but doesn't feel good about her current man. The family receives some public assistance. Angelino's main concern is keeping her kids safe. There's often gun fire in the streets nearby.

### GRANDMOTHER

Grandmother is Felicia's mother's mother. She is 71 and has arthritis and doesn't get around very well. She lives alone in Manhattan. She is kind and loving, also very tough. She has gone through a lot. For years she worked in a sweat shop sewing dresses. She lives on a small pension. Grandmother has always told her children and grandchildren that the only way to a better life was to get educated.

### UNCLE ALVARO

Felicia's uncle lives upstate on a small farm where he works very hard. He is 47 and a bachelor. Felicia doesn't know how much money he makes. He seems not to spend much but not to want anything either. When she used to visit him as a child, he always insisted that she sit on his lap. He gave her lots of kisses. Sometimes at night she would wake up and see him standing in the doorway to her room. When she graduated from high school, he gave her fifty dollars. He doesn't say much, but is always polite. Uncle Alvaro's brothers and their families like to visit him on the farm.

August 1995