

MOTHERS' TRAINING - ILLNESS PHASE
(HRA PROJECT)

SESSION 4: HOW DO I START MY PLAN?

(Day 2, Afternoon. Two hours in length.)

OBJECTIVES:

1. Mothers will feel more comfortable proceeding with custody planning.
2. Mothers will be able to solve more effectively problems which obstruct custody planning.
3. Mothers will be able to deal with potential guardians changing their minds.
4. Mothers will increase their skills in telling their children about appointing someone to take care of them.
5. Mothers will be able to ask someone to serve as a guardian.

RATIONALE:

The first session on custody planning focused on selecting the person who will serve as the care taker. The second session provided options on different ways to provide future care. In the third session the emphasis is on implementation. What are the barriers to implementation and how can they be overcome? What happens if your chosen custodian backs out? How do you tell your children? How do you ask someone to serve as a guardian? What are the resources that can help you? Thus, the general rationale is to move from motivation to planning to implementation.

It would be naive to assume that the negative feelings surrounding custody planning would go away or be resolved in the two previous sessions. Consequently the meaning of doing a plan and the accompanying feelings are dealt with again.

PROCEDURES:

1. Introduce the participants and the topic. Give out Strokes. Review the previous session. Do a lottery. (5 minutes)
2. Elicit through personal stories the unhappy feelings and thoughts that go with custody planning. Explore the meaning of custody planning. (15 minutes)
3. Identify barriers to custody planning. Use problem solving to eliminate them. (15 minutes)
4. Prepare for potential custodians changing their minds. (15 minutes)

5. Role playing telling the children about appointing someone to take care of them. (20 minutes)
6. Role play asking someone to serve as a guardian. (15 minutes)
7. Determine how mothers react to having guardians join the group for selected sessions. (10 minutes)
8. Do a relaxation sequence. (5 minutes)
9. End with a review of the session and preview of the next one. Set between-session goals. Present resources on custody planning. Provide free time. Give appreciation to each other. (20 minutes)

MATERIALS:

Strokes
Lottery tickets
Lottery prize
Script: Doris and Aunt
Handout: When Sharing Your Plans with Your Children

Exercise 1: What Happens Next?
(5 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to build self-esteem, increase group cohesion and introduce the focus of this session. The introduction of participants which includes saying something positive about themselves is assumed to increase self-confidence and Strokes are to build cohesion.]

Welcome back.

I hope you had a pleasant lunch and feel rested.

This afternoon when you introduce yourself please give us your first name and complete this sentence, "I have control over...."

For example, you might say, "I am Sherri, and I have control over who will take care of my kids."

I will start.

I am and I have control over

HAVE THE MOTHERS GIVE THEIR FIRST NAMES AND SAY WHAT THEY HAVE CONTROL OVER.

Thank you.

It is now time for a lottery.

We are glad that you are here and that you are on time for the afternoon session.

HAND OUT LOTTERY TICKETS.

Please write your name on the ticket drop it in the bowl.

If you have won in the first three sessions and if you win again today, we draw again and the prize goes to the second winner.

We want to make sure that others get prizes.

DO A LOTTERY. SELECT A WINNER, AND GIVE OUT THE PRIZE.

This morning we worked on selecting the best plan for taking care of your children.

This afternoon we will focus on how to start putting the plan into effect.

That involves the feelings and thoughts that you have about doing it, barriers and overcoming them, dealing with custodian backing out, practicing telling your children of your plan, and asking someone to serve as the care taker.

Here are your Strokes.

HAND OUT TWENTY STROKES TO EACH MOTHER.

I hope that by the end of the session you have given away most of your Strokes to other mothers, showing them that you appreciate their contributions.

The objective is to have few if any Strokes left in your pile.

Are there any questions before we get started?

ANSWER QUESTIONS.

Exercise 2: How Do I Feel About Making a Plan?
(15 minutes)

[The purpose of the exercise is to continue expressing painful thoughts and feelings about making a custody plan. It is assumed that expression and acceptance of these frightening and despairing feelings and thoughts will lead to more comfort with planning and increased action tendencies.]

Working on a custody plan can be very painful.

Listen to what this woman has to say:

"I know I am doing the right thing trying to find someone who will take care of my kids. It has to be done, but it makes me feel terrible. I don't want to die. Leaving my kids is too hurtful to think about. Sometimes when I am talking to my lawyer, I start crying. I can't help it. When I am making a plan, it is hard to deny what's going to happen. I don't want to be reminded. I guess it is all right to push these thoughts out of my head as long as I keep making the arrangements."

Here is a mother with a lot of courage.

It hurts her deeply, but she is facing what is best for her children.

Does her story sound familiar?

Does anyone want to tell the group what your own personal story is about making a custody plan?

Does anyone want to tell us how she is holding up while trying to make plans for her children's future?

Remember that nobody has to say a word.

ACCEPT SHARING OR SILENCE. GIVE MOTHERS A CHANCE TO TALK ABOUT HOW MAKING A PLAN AFFECTS THEM, BUT DON'T PUSH. ENCOURAGE LOTS OF GROUP SUPPORT. GIVE OUT STROKES. IF NO ONE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS, ACCEPT IT AND COMMENT THAT IT IS VERY HARD. ON THE OTHER HAND IF SOMEONE TALKS FOR MORE THAN A MINUTE OR TWO, INDICATE THAT WE NEED TO GIVE OTHERS A CHANCE. THEN GO ON TO THE NEXT EXERCISE. DON'T TRY TO BREAK DOWN DENIAL. IT CAN SERVE A USEFUL PURPOSE.

Identifying your thoughts and feelings and expressing them with others who understand and support you is a way of moving forward and allowing you to do what has to be done.

All of you are very brave.

IF GROUP SUPPORT DOES NOT ENABLE SOMEONE TO REGAIN CONTROL, DO A BRIEF RELAXATION EXERCISE:

Let's take a moment to relax together.

Take a deep breath in. PAUSE

Let it out slowly. PAUSE

Take another deep breath in. PAUSE

Let it out slowly. PAUSE

Think of yourself as the mountain. PAUSE

Let the clouds roll in and shut out the light of those unhappy thoughts.

Feel the warm, gentle rain washing away the pain. PAUSE

You are the mountain - strong - solid. PAUSE

Feel the streams running down over you.

Washing the pain away. PAUSE

You are the mountain reaching into the clouds.

The mountain's spirit will last for millions of years.

Breathe out. PAUSE

Breathe out. PAUSE

You are the mountain. PAUSE

IF THE RELAXATION SEQUENCE DOES NOT ENABLE SOMEONE TO GAIN EMOTIONAL CONTROL, ONE OF THE FACILITATORS CAN GO OUT OF THE ROOM WITH HER FOR A FEW MINUTES.

Exercise 3: How Do I Deal With Obstacles?
(15 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to increase problem solving skills for use on barriers to implementation. Modelling and small group work on an obstacle are used.]

Last time we went over all the different options.

You could see that they were complicated, and it is not too far fetched to think that barriers might come up which would need to be removed.

Let's take a look at some obstacles which could get in your way and how to solve them.

In solving a problem there are a few simple steps to take.

I'll go over them with you quickly.

1. Define the problem?
2. Define the goal?
3. Make a list of possible solutions.
4. Judge each solution and choose one.
5. Decide how to do it.

For example, Maria says, "I haven't got a lawyer."

That's the problem.

The goal might be to get a lawyer, but maybe she doesn't really need one.

Let's say she does need one - so getting one is the goal.

What are some solutions?

When you are coming up with solutions, don't evaluate them yet.

We want as many ideas as possible, even if some of them sound off the wall.

So what are a few of Maria's possible solutions?

One, see if there is a lawyer in her neighborhood.

Two, ask Uncle Louie if he knows a lawyer.

Three, go to Brooklyn Legal Services.

Maria hasn't much money and doesn't want to spend much.

Maria also wants a lawyer who knows about guardianship.

When Maria looks at her choices, she sees that the lawyer in her neighborhood and Uncle Louie's lawyer are expensive.

Brooklyn Legal Services are free.

She also learns that Brooklyn Legal Services has lots of experience helping mothers with AIDS.

So, she chooses to go there.

Maria calls up, talks to a lawyer, and decides to go in and meet with the lawyer face to face.

Have you got the idea for solving a problem?

WRITE UP ON NEWSPRINT: PROBLEM, GOAL, POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS, JUDGE AND CHOOSE, HOW DO IT. KEEP THE NEWSPRINT UP ON THE WALL FOR REFERENCE.

I would like you to try and solve a problem that has come up for Sonia.

We'll break into two teams.

DIVIDE THE GROUP INTO TWO TEAMS. A FACILITATOR GOES WITH EACH TEAM TO COACH IF NEEDED.

Here's Sonia's situation.

She wants to file guardianship papers.

Her grandmother has agreed to be the guardian.

Sonia has not lived with the father of her oldest children for six years.

She needs his consent.

Sonia called his sister who did not know where he was.

In your team define the problem, decide on the goal, come up with possible solutions, evaluate them, choose one and decide how to carry out the plan.

ALLOW FIVE MINUTES TO WORK ON THE PROBLEM. BRING THE TEAMS BACK TOGETHER.

Let's hear how you solved Sonia's problem.

We'll start with this team over here.

OBTAIN REPORTS FROM EACH TEAM AND MAKE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT PROBLEM SOLVING, AS NEEDED. GIVE OUT STROKES.

Can you think of obstacles within yourself that would keep you from carrying through on making a plan?

ENCOURAGE SHARING.

What thoughts does the group have on handling those obstacles?

ENCOURAGE IDEAS USING THE PROBLEM SOLVING FORMAT IF POSSIBLE.

Exercise 4: How Would I Feel If My Plans Fell Through?
(15 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to prepare mothers for the likelihood of custodians changing their minds or events happening that lead to new custodian. It is assumed that being aware of the possibility will make it easier to deal with should the situation occur.]

To illustrate another situation which you might encounter and should prepare for we will do a little scene.

IF THERE ARE TWO MOTHERS WHO WOULD BE COMFORTABLE READING THE FOLLOWING SCRIPT, HAVE THEM PLAY THE PARTS. IF NOT, THE TWO FACILITATORS CAN READ THE SCRIPT.

DORIS AND AUNT JANE

DORIS: What is it you wanted to talk about Aunt Jane?

AUNT: Well...

DORIS: Yes?

AUNT: Remember you asked me to be guardian for Philip and Nadine?

DORIS: Sure. I have a lawyer getting the papers together.

AUNT: This is not easy to say.

DORIS: Go ahead.

AUNT: You've been counting on it.

DORIS: Definitely.

AUNT: I can't do it.

DORIS: What!

AUNT: Doris, I just can't do it.

DORIS: But, Aunt Jane, you promised.

AUNT: I know I did. I feel badly about it too.

DORIS: But why?

AUNT: I've been thinking about it. I'm just too old. I don't think I'm up to taking care of some kids. I haven't got the strength.

DORIS: Why didn't you say "no" in the first place?

AUNT: I wanted to help you. I thought I could do it, but the more I thought about it, the more I knew I had made a mistake.

DORIS: Shit! Aunt Jane, how could you do this to me?

AUNT: Don't get nasty. I said I'm sorry.

DORIS: Oh, Aunt Jane, you can't imagine what this does to me.

AUNT: I know you feel badly, but I can't help it.

DORIS: Now what am I going to do?

AUNT: You'll work it out.

DORIS: That's easy for you to say.

THE END

This kind of thing does happen more than you would imagine.

Sometimes an event occurs that makes the mother question things, and the mother decides that the person she chose is not the right one.

How would you feel if what went on in the little scene happened to you?

OBTAIN RESPONSES AND ASK HOW THEY WOULD DEAL WITH THEIR FEELINGS.

How could you prepare for this mentally?

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION.

Exercise 5: How Do I Tell My Children?
(20 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to improve the mothers' comfort and skill in speaking to their children about the custody plan. It is assumed that role playing with modeling and instruction is an effective way to achieve this end.]

Now we want to work on how to talk to your children about the custody plan.

Why should you talk to them?

First of all you want them to feel comfortable with the plan and to understand your choice.

Second, in court they will be asked how they like the plan.

Hopefully, after you go over it with them, they won't have major objections.

Here are some things to consider - all of them show you that you have a number of choices.

HAND OUT "WHEN SHARING YOUR PLAN WITH YOUR CHILDREN" AND GO OVER IT.

WHEN SHARING YOUR PLAN WITH YOUR CHILDREN

WHO?

WHICH CHILDREN SHOULD BE PRESENT AT THE SAME TIME?

WHEN?

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO SPEAK TO THEM?

WHERE?

WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO SPEAK TO THEM?

HOW?

HOW TO DO IT? FACE TO FACE, THROUGH A LETTER, ON THE TELEPHONE? DO IT ALONE OR WITH SOMEONE ELSE PRESENT TO SUPPORT YOU?

CHOICE?

IS YOUR MIND MADE UP ON THE PLAN OR WILL YOU ALLOW YOUR CHILDREN TO INFLUENCE YOU?

WHAT?

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE? SHOULD IT BE THE SAME FOR EACH CHILD? HAVE YOU REHEARSED IT?

PREPARED?

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR THEIR REACTIONS? HOW WILL YOU COMFORT THEM AND HANDLE THEIR REACTIONS?

The handout is fairly straight forward, but I'll add a few comments.

Again there can be advantages and disadvantages.

Under "Who?" you may want to talk to the older kids and younger kids separately, but on the other hand maybe an older child can be helpful with a younger child.

You know you children better than anyone.

"When" and "where" may go together.

Sometimes it might be good to talk outside of the apartment.

It can make a teenager feel more adult and may help a child contain his or her emotional reactions.

As far as "choice" goes, the point is don't encourage a child to think that he or she can change when your decision

when your mind is totally made up.

Remember that if you make custody arrangements through the courts, your children will be asked what their reaction is to your plan.

"How" - some mothers may want some else with them for support.

Maybe also they could express ceratin thoughts and feelings better in writing.

You may want to vary the message depending on the child.

For example, you may appeal for help to an older child and try to calm fears in the younger child.

All "preparation" means is don't be surprised by a child's reaction and be ready to comfort them.

Here is a brief example of talking with a teenager.

THE FACILITATORS MODEL BY READING THE SCRIPT.

SHARING THE PLAN WITH EILEEN

EILEEN: Why did we come here for coffee? You never take me out for coffee.

MOTHER: I thought it would be good to talk to you away from the other kids.

EILEEN: What about? It sounds heavy.

MOTHER: Well, you know my condition.

EILEEN: How could I ever forget?

MOTHER: I have to make sure that you and other kids are OK in the future.

EILEEN: What do you mean?

MOTHER: Have someone to take care of you, a place to live, food, get you to school, wash your clothes - everything.

EILEEN: I can take care of the others.

MOTHER: Oh, Eileen, you have always been so thoughtful, but that wouldn't be fair to you. I want so much for you.

EILEEN: So, I can see having someone for Cindy and Joe - they're just little kids - but not for me.

MOTHER: No, I'm sorry, dear, but I want you all together and I want someone there for you, just like for them. Remember you are only fourteen. I've chosen Grandma. She's going to be appointed your legal guardian. She's willing to move in.

EILEEN: She's too old.

MOTHER: You can help her.

EILEEN: Why not Aunt Betty?

MOTHER: She's got her own problems.

EILEEN: Please, mom, let's have Aunt Betty. You didn't even ask me what I thought.

MOTHER: I had to do this myself - maybe when you are older and have your own family you will understand. Maybe it sounds selfish, but what it most important is that I am happy with the person. I like Aunt Betty, but from my point of view, she just wouldn't do.

EILEEN: I don't get it.

MOTHER: Let's talk about how you can help grandma.

THE END

What would you have done differently in this situation?

OBTAIN RESPONSES.

Obviously this conversation will go on for some time and has just scratched the surface, but I wanted you to get a feel for what I was talking about.

Would each of you take a minute and think about how you would communicate to your children what the custody plan is going to be.

ALLOW SEVERAL MINUTES.

I am going to split the group into two small groups.

To bring this home we need a volunteer to play the mother in each small group.

SELECT THE VOLUNTEERS.

Now, mothers, decide on how many children you want to meet with.

PICK THE RIGHT NUMBER OF CHILDREN FROM THE REMAINING MOTHERS.

Decide on what their ages are and tell them.

One word to the children, don't give your mother an absolutely terrible time.

Get into your groups.

DIVIDE THE GROUP IN HALF. A FACILITATOR GOES WITH EACH GROUP.

Mothers, pick a plan to tell them - guardianship, adoption, or foster care.

PAUSE WHILE MOTHERS DECIDE ON A PLAN.

OK, go ahead mothers and tell your children about the custody plan.

HAVE THE ROLE PLAY GO FOR FIVE MINUTES. THEN STOP FOR FEEDBACK. FACILITATORS GIVE FEEDBACK INSTRUCTIONS.

First, let's hear from the mothers: how do you feel? What one thing did you do that you liked and what one thing would you do differently.

OBTAIN A RESPONSE.

Now from the children: how did you feel? What one thing did "mother" do that you liked, and, if you had been

mother, what one thing would you have done differently?

OBTAIN A RESPONSE.

Let's hear from the observers: how did you feel watching the scene? What one thing did "mother" do that you liked, and, if you had been mother, what one thing would you have done differently?

OBTAIN RESPONSES AND ENGAGE EVERYONE IN A GENERAL DISCUSSION OF PRESENTING A PLAN TO THEIR CHILDREN.

Exercise 6: How Do I Ask Someone to Be Guardian?
(15 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to improve the skills needed to ask someone to be a guardian. It is assumed that role play a situation will improve skills.]

Now we want to practice asking someone you have chosen to be a guardian.

When you ask someone, there are a few pointers to keep in mind.

First, express in a straightforward way what your needs are.

WRITE "EXPRESS NEEDS" ON NEWSPRINT.

Second, indicate how you feel.

WRITE "FEEL" ON NEWSPRINT.

Third, start by saying some thing positive about the person.

WRITE "POSITIVE" ON NEWSPRINT.

Four, make a clear statement about what you want from them.

WRITE "WANT" ON NEWSPRINT.

I am sure that each of you can put those four points in your own style and can tailor how you approach it to the person you are asking.

I am going to divide the group into three's.

One person will do the asking, the second person will be asked, and the third person will be the observer.

If you are doing the asking, tell the other who they are playing: your friend Marzella, Uncle Ed, your sister

Rosalyn, whoever.

When the first round is over, the observer will say what she liked and what she would have done differently.

Keep switching until everyone has had a turn playing each part.

Let each role play go for about three minutes.

DIVIDE THE GROUP INTO THREES. IF NEEDED TO HAVE THE RIGHT NUMBERS, A FACILITATOR WILL FILL IN. WHEN EVERYONE HAS HAD A TURN BRING THE GROUP BACK TOGETHER.

How did you feel doing that role play?

OBTAIN RESPONSES.

Were there certain parts of asking that were hard or harder than you had expected?

OBTAIN RESPONSES AND DISCUSS. ENCOURAGE THE GROUP TO BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS TO THE DIFFICULT ISSUES THAT ARE RAISED.

Exercise 7: Should Guardians Come To Our Training?
(10 minutes)

ELIMINATED.

Exercise 8: How Can I Get Some of the Tension Out?
(5 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is reduce tension and end on a positive note. A relaxation sequence is the chosen vehicle to achieve that goal.]

We are nearing the end of today's session, so, it is time for a little relaxation.

Get yourself in a comfortable position.

As you breathe in, say to yourself "Clear mind." PAUSE

Breathe in PAUSE "Clear mind." PAUSE

Now don't pay attention to breathing in.

Just experience the warm air flowing out. PAUSE

Breathe out as long you can. PAUSE

Breathe out. PAUSE

If your eyes wish to close, let them. PAUSE

Imagine that you are standing before a steaming hot tub. PAUSE

You begin to lower yourself into the hot tub. PAUSE

Can you feel your feet touching the water? PAUSE

Can you feel the water on your ankles as you go in farther? PAUSE

Now your legs.

Feel the warm water coming up your legs as you lower yourself down. PAUSE

Can you feel the warm water on your hips as they sink in? PAUSE

Can you feel you abdomen becoming warm and wet? PAUSE

Feel your chest being covered with the water. PAUSE

Let your arms drop into the water and sink. PAUSE

Can you feel the water on your neck and shoulders? PAUSE

Roll your head around. PAUSE

Stretch your neck. PAUSE

Can you feel the warmth spreading every where? PAUSE

Has the tension melted away? PAUSE

Just sit there and soak. LONG PAUSE

Time to get out and towel off.

Dry yourself. PAUSE

Feel good.

Feel good.

Gradually open your eyes.

How do you feel?

Exercise 9: How Can I Show Appreciation?
(20 minutes)

[The purpose of this exercise is to create group cohesion and continue motivation for taking positive steps forward.]

Today we have worked on putting a plan into action.

In the next session we start with practicing ways to hear better what our children are telling us.

Between now and when we meet again, I would like you to meet a goal that you set now.

The goal should be realistic, clear, not too hard or too easy, and obvious when completed.

Try to select something related to today's session.

Examples might be asking someone to be a guardian, discussing your plan with one of your children, speaking to a lawyer, calling someone who might know the location of your child's father, and getting a guardian petition form from the court.

Take a moment and decide on what your goal is.

WAIT A LITTLE BIT WHILE MOTHERS PICK A GOAL.

OK, now let's go around and hear what everyone's goal is.

HAVE EACH MOTHER TELL HER GOAL. HELP OUT IF THE GOAL DOESN'T MEET THE CRITERIA.

One thing I want to remind you about is the list of legal resources that I gave out in the first session on custody planning.

These leads can help you find other resources.

Seeking assistance from one of the legal services that specializes serving mothers living with AIDS is a really smart thing to do.

We have been leaving 10 minutes at the end of sessions for someone to bring up something she wanted to talk to the group about.

So, who wants to go first?

PROVIDE 10 MINUTES OF FREE TIME FOR BRINGING UP ISSUES.

Now let's take some time to show appreciation to each other.

GIVE OUT STROKES AND SHOW APPRECIATION. INCLUDE EVERYONE.

THE END OF SESSION 4

DORIS AND AUNT JANE

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AUNT: Well...

DORIS: Yes?

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AUNT: This is not easy to say.

DORIS: Go ahead.

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DORIS: What!

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DORIS: Now what am I going to do?

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