NO KIDS IN THE MIDDLE

LORENTZHUIS & KJTC

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How many children?

- Divorce rate in Europe 44%
- 30% complications
- 15% high conflict divorce

NL: each year + 3000 children < 18yrs: 16000 children
effect on children

70% finding new balance within two years

30% Problems, mostly when parents fight
- Depression, anxiety, aggression, risk takers, failing in school
- Split loyalty, torn apart
- Siding with one parent as survival strategy
Context

• Lobby of the silly fathers

• 1998: both parents legal authority

• 2009 Obligatory parental plan
We all get crazy

* Youth care; child protection, lawyers, mediators, therapists, social workers, family guardians
* The social network, family, friends, school
* Our secretary

especially the children
demonising

The other is the perpetrator and I am the victim
Monologue, no dialogue, no reflection
I know the truth, I can prove it
Denying the tragedy of life
Destructive process that destroys connections and love
RISK FACTORS

Often individual focus

• For example,
  – Hostile attributions
  – Negative emotions (e.g., contempt, anger)
  – Defensiveness
  – Communication- and conflict-styles (e.g., criticism, complaints)

Sources: Bradbury & Fincham, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Gottman, 1998
Our research relational & social focus

- **Relational focus**
  - Dynamics between partners
  - Self-other discrepancy in perception

- **Social focus**
  - Social network, especially each partner’s friends and family
  - Influence of social network on conflict escalation

*Source: Widmer et al., 2005*
Social networks: The ties that bind

• Social network overlap associated with relationship satisfaction
• Social support useful in times of stress and crisis for individual and couple

Source: Julien & Markman, 1991; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992
Fighting parents

• Do not want to come together: want to tell their own truth: two truths
• Both trapped in a tunnel vision
• Therapist is torn apart between the two truths, two monologues
• Therapist can add to the demonizing process
children in therapy

- Symptoms can get worse
- Children start to feel more but cannot express these feelings at home
Individual and context factors

- Personal history, personality, resilience, talents
- History of the relationship, relational trauma’s
- Economy, housing, network, education, work, culture
What usually works in therapy doesn’t work with fighting divorces: new roads?
Safety and development of children in the center
multiple family therapy:
Parents' group and Children's group parallel
Basic attitude

- Children in the centre
- Teamwork for therapists
- Responsibility in stead of control and agreements (safety?)
- Motivate and activate parents (they have to do the work)
- Fights as destructive patterns that destroys connections and love
- Attention for vulnerability and trauma, fight / flight and freeze as trauma reactions. (wounded animals)
- Reaching out and working together with the social network
- Parental team or parallel solo parenthood (L.Cottyn)
Intake

* Parents and Children separately
* Contact with professional network: therapists, lawyers, mediators, child protection, youth care
* They have to come together
Intake 1

• Parents together
• Information about the project
• Questions from the parents
• Addiction? Actual violence?
• Stop Legal processes or on hold
• Network is involved
• YES, DOUBTS (one week reflection time), NO
Intake 2

- Parents, children, therapists from parent and children group. Short start together
- Children leave with child therapist(s)
- Each parent 20-3- minutes with one therapist: what are shocking experiences in the relationship, after divorce, in former relationships or in childhood (find triggers)
- Therapists share what they heard and reflect about that, parents listen
- Who are coming to the information network evening)
- Short closure with all (parents, children, therapists)
Social network

Information evening
for
New partners, Grand parents, Family, Friends.

Please help us!!!
Super opa en oma!
Intake children

Two houses and the space in between

Papa

good and worries

Mama

good and worries
PROGRAM

Eight sessions

1. Loving parents and Destructive patterns

2. Children in the center

3. A narrative about the separation without demonisation.
   Escalation, de-escalation, window of tolerance, trauma reactions

4. Compliments, New connections, new solutions for old conflicts

5. More movements
children's group

Parallel
Warming up
Artistic expressions
Reflections
Wishes
Closure
Session 6

6. Performance of the children: drawings, pictures, movie, dance, graffiti, text
Performance of the parents: text, poems, art, film
session 7

- reflections about the presentations
- Childrens resilience (what to do when parents continue fighting)
- Parents new movements
Session 8

• Evaluation

• how will the process continue, what is needed / wished for