

Promotion of Resilience for Children of Divorce

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Overview of Presentation

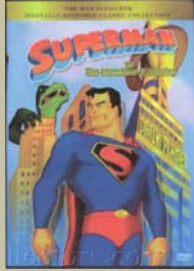
- I. What do we mean by resilience? Where does it come from?
- II. Can we promote resilience for children in stressful situations? Parental divorce as a case example.
 - I. How can we do it?
 - II. What's the evidence that it works?
- III. Can we deliver a program to promote resilience to families? Will the families use it?

Children Grow Up in Stressful Times

- Many children in America are exposed to serious stressful situations
- While some suffer serious problems others adapt well despite the stressors in their lives
- Resilience is a term we use to refer to those who adapt well despite the stressors in their lives
- Two ways to think about resilience:
 - Superman model
 - Contextual model

Superman Model of Resilience

- Both parents died while he was a baby
- Whole community killed
- Sent away to live with strangers
- Yet – because of his personality of steel grows up to be healthy, strong, and highly pro-social adult



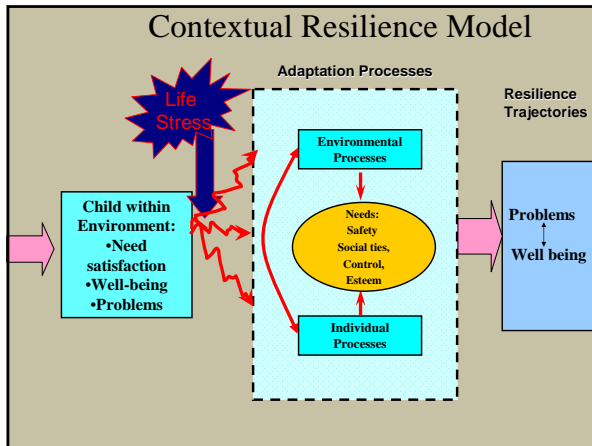
Superman is the wrong model for resilience!

- Resilience is not simply a characteristic of individuals!
- Resilience is a process which involves individual and social environmental forces.
- Superman had:
 - *personal strengths,*
 - *nurturing parents*
 - *healthy community in which to grow!*
- Imagine the outcome if he did not have nurturing parents or a healthy community?



Contextual Model of Resilience

- Adversities disrupt how children satisfy normal needs
 - **Physical safety**
 - **Security of social relations (parents and peers)**
 - **Self-worth**
 - **Control, etc.**
- Adaptation involves reorganizing internal world (beliefs about relationships, self-worth, etc.) and environmental relations to find new ways to satisfy needs – children can adapt in healthy or unhealthy ways
- *Resilience* involves adaptation in ways that lead to healthy satisfaction of needs and positive well-being – low problems (e.g. depression, substance use) and positive accomplishment of developmental tasks (e.g., success in school, peer, etc.)



Parental Divorce as a Case Example of Resilience

- Approximately 35% of children experience parental divorce
- Divorce is associated with increases in many problem outcomes for children: mental health problems, substance use and abuse, school problems, high risk sexual behavior
- However – most children are resilient following divorce – about 75% adjust well while 25% experience ongoing problems

What factors lead to child resilience following divorce?

- Low inter-parental conflict
- Effective parenting by mother
- Effective parenting by father
- Effective coping on the part of children
- Low parent mental health problems
- Low economic stress in the family

Three Critical Questions

- 1. Can we build programs to promote resilience?
- 2. Can we demonstrate that they work to improve children's lives?
- 3. Can we deliver them to children and families?

New Beginnings Program: Promoting Resilience for Children Following Parental Divorce

- Works with divorced mothers
- Focuses on building resilience resources
 - Parental warmth
 - Effective discipline
 - Support contact with father
 - Decrease interparental conflict

New Beginnings Program: Promoting Resilience for Children Following Divorce



Research Evaluation of New Beginnings Program

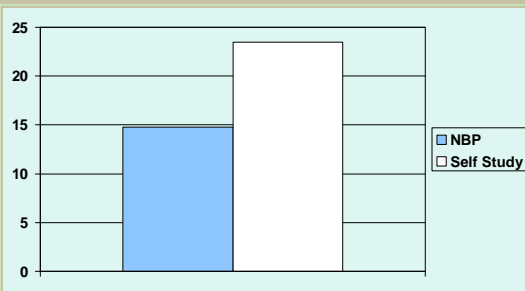
- Evaluated in an experimental trial involving 240 children (age 9-12)
- Assessed children in the program and those who did not receive the program at 5 points
 - ✓ Pre
 - ✓ Post
 - ✓ 3 Months
 - ✓ 6 Months
 - ✓ 6 Years (age 15 – 18)
 - ✓ *14 Years (23 – 26) – In Progress*

Results 6 Years Following Program Participation

Children whose parents were in the program had fewer problems and better adjustment as compared to those whose parents did not receive the program

- 37% reduction in 1-year prevalence of diagnosed mental disorder on C-DISC
- Improve Grade Point Average (50% increase in number of students with A or B average in high school)
- Improved self-esteem
- Reduce Number of Sexual Partners
- Reduced alcohol, marijuana and drug use (for those who were most at risk)

One Year Prevalence of Diagnosed Mental Disorder (C-DISC)



Question IV: Can we deliver New Beginnings to Divorcing Families? Partner with Family Courts?

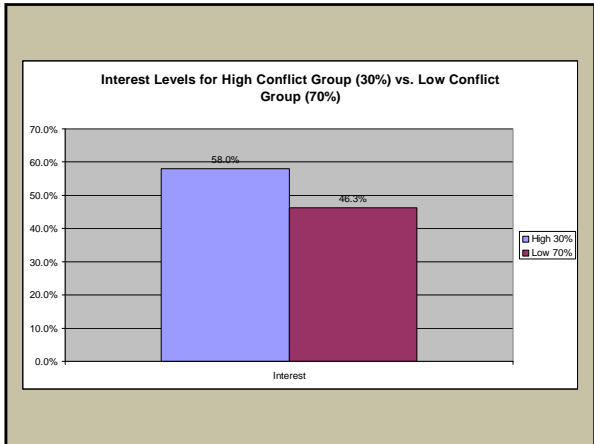
- ✓ Institutional Partner for Dissemination: Domestic Relations Court – they have a monopoly on divorce!
- ✓ We are both interested in promoting resilience of children following divorce

Short-to-Long Recruitment Study (Collaboration with Maricopa Court)

- Many family courts have “short” parenting programs for divorcing families
- Some (including Maricopa County) mandate a short (4 hour) program
- Evaluations of these programs find high level of satisfaction but little evidence of impact on child well-being
- Research question: Can we use this “short” mandatory program as a platform to recruiting to a longer – “effective” voluntary program?
- Develop videos based recruitment using social psychology compliance techniques

Short to Long Preliminary Results

- Overall 50% of families express positive interest in participating in the program either immediately or next year
- Participants fill out screening measure to assess “risk” – level of conflict, child and parent mental health problems, etc.
- For 30% highest conflict
 - 59% expressed positive interest (46% for low risk)



Summary

- Contextual model of resilience – multiple resources for resilience – child, family and community
- We can develop programs to promote resilience: Example of New Beginnings Program for children of divorce
- Resilience promotion programs can have long term benefits for children
- Need partnerships of agencies that serve children and families to deliver resilience promotion programs to families who can use them
