



2012 Parenting and Family Stabilization Class

Annual Program Report

Bob Decker, Ph.D., NCC, LMHC

President/CEO

## 2012 Parenting and Family Stabilization Class

### Annual Program Report

In February 2012, Mental Health America of East Central Florida (MHAECF) submitted a 4-hour Parenting and Family Stabilization Class to the Florida Department of Children and Families and received approval to become a provider. The 4-hour court mandated class is in response to the Florida Statute Chapter 61.21, requiring anyone applying for divorce that has children to take the class. The curriculum development followed the Florida Administrative Rule 65C-32 guidelines for the required components of the parenting course, education requirements as well as the responsibilities of the provider.

The 4-hour Parenting and Family Stabilization Class provides divorcing parents with children the opportunity to learn about and discuss the effect that divorce and changing family situations has on children. The class introduces parents to methods of minimizing the negative consequences of divorce on both themselves and their children. Particular focus is placed on making parents aware of the various ways their children may express their reactions to the changing family structure. The live class also presents the effects of grief and loss and anger management.

The required components of this course include but are not limited to:

- Divorce as loss for both parents and children
- Permanency of parental role and shared parenting responsibilities
- Developmental stages of childhood
- Communicating with children in divorce situations
- Communicating with the other parent
- Abuse and neglect
- Legal concepts
- Parenting time/Visitation schedules
- Community Resources
- Step-parenting and Dating Issues

At the time parents approach a legal divorce, most are emotionally upset and primarily involved in the changes in their lives. During this period many parents find it difficult to recognize and respond to the needs of their children.

Divorcing parents who do not cooperatively try to meet the needs of their children are often parents who return to court many times in an attempt to resolve conflicts over custody and visitation. These battles are costly and usually result in ongoing conflicts.

Research has found that if children experience negative consequences as a result of their parent's divorce, these same children have a high probability of having difficulties later in life.

### **Program Report**

N = 96

There were 44 males and 52 females for a total of 96 individuals that registered for the Parenting and Family Stabilization Class.

The class was not approved until February so there were no attendees during the month of January. The most active months were the summer months of May, June and July. The slowest months were November and April.

A partial scholarship is provided for individuals declared indigent by the court. To qualify, attendees must provide a copy of the certification of indigency from the court. The partial scholarship reduces the registration fee to \$10. Regular registration is \$40.

Presentation Evaluation

The presentation evaluation asked for a response to ten statements utilizing the following scale:

- 5 Strongly Agree
- 4 Agree
- 3 Neutral
- 2 Disagree
- 1 Strongly Disagree

The following chart represents the scores converted to percentages.

- The material was presented in an organized manner.  
The attendees rated this statement at 97.9%%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 80%.
- The presenter was well prepared.  
The attendees rated this statement at 99.4%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 80%.
- The length of the presentation was appropriate.  
The attendees rated this statement at 93%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.
- The handout material was useful.  
The attendees rated this statement at 96%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.

- The presentation increased my knowledge.  
The attendees rated this statement at 95%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.
- The accommodations were comfortable and adequate.  
The attendees rated this statement at 94%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.
- I know who to contact for more information.  
The attendees rated this statement at 95%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.
- It is likely that I will use some of the information from this class in the next 30 days.  
The attendees rated this statement at 95.7%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 80%.
- I have gained insight into parenting responsibilities from this class.  
The attendees rated this statement at 96.6%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 20%.
- I have gained insight into the effects of divorce on children from this class.  
The attendees rated this statement at 97%.  
The highest rating received for this category was 100%  
The lowest rating received for this category was 60%.

## **Discussion:**

The average of scores in each category was above 90% indicating extremely positive feedback on the quality and content of the Parenting and Family Stabilization Class. The feedback indicated the majority of the participants received valuable information that they would use in the future to develop parenting skills or communication skills to have a better relationship with their ex-spouse.

The lowest score of 93% was received in response to question 3 concerning the length of the presentation. The next lowest score of 94% was received in response to question 6 concerning the accommodations.

The highest score of 99.4 was received was in response to question 2 concerning the presenter being well-prepared. The second highest score of 97.9% was received in response to question 1 concerning the organization of the material presented.

There were more females than males registering for this class, however, all couples with children that are divorcing must take the class. So it is likely that a fairly equal number of males and females are ordered to take the class.

## **Attendee Comments**

The comments from the attendees were very positive. The comments included statements such as:

- The class provided very good information that will help me in the future.
- The class taught me a lot and the teacher explained the concepts very well.
- It is calming and reassuring to know that I can do well parenting.

- It helped me realize that I am not alone in my efforts to move forward.
- The class provided me with tools to use to better my approach to our situation.
- The class helped me to think about making changes in the future.
- After this class, now that I know more I can be a better parent for my child.
- The class helped me to learn that I need to get along with my ex-spouse, not for me but for my children.
- The class provided tools on how to be more respectful to the other spouse.

### **Recommendations**

The core components of the class have been well received and the instruction method appears to be effective. There are no changes indicated for the curriculum at this time.

The lowest score received was in response to question 3 concerning the length of the presentation. This may indicate a general dissatisfaction with the mandate for the four hour course in Florida Statute rather than dissatisfaction with the course in general. It might be more appropriate to rephrase question 3 to read:

- The length of the presentation was appropriate in fulfilling the 4-hour mandated requirement of Florida Statute.

It is indicated that more females than males are registering for this live class. This could be an indication that males are more prone to take the course on-line rather than set through a live interaction class. Since no data

exists on the number of males and females registering for on-line classes, it would be interesting to find if there is a correlation. If such a correlation exists, marketing could target males to encourage them to take the live class where they can interact with others that are going through similar circumstances.

Registration for some classes have been low. To increase registrations for the classes, MHAECF plans to conduct a direct marketing campaign to attorney's in Volusia and Flagler counties to educate them about the benefits of the class for their clients. Also, MHAECF plans to provide the Family Court with brochures to provide to clients that have been ordered to take the class.

The number of indigent scholarship registrations exceeded the number of regular registrations during four months. MHAECF is dependent on getting enough regular registrations to make-up for the indigent scholarships. Due to the cost involved in operating the class, starting January 1, 2013, the indigent scholarship fee will be raised to \$20.

MHAECF has a partnership with an organization from California to do an on-line parenting class, however, the content is not the same as the MHAECF live class. MHAECF does have plans to provide our own on-line parenting class in the near future which will increase revenue.

Currently, MHAECF does not track demographics and zip codes for our parenting class attendees. Starting January 1, 2013, MHAECF will provide tracking for demographics and place of residence.