

# **Divorce as a Family Transition Interventions for Divorced Parents and Children**

Prof. Dr. Wassilios E. Fthenakis  
Director of the State Institute of Early Childhood Education and Research,  
Munich  
University of Augsburg

## **Introduction**

Demographic and psychological studies show that children and adults from divorced families utilise professional counselling two to three times more frequently than members coming from intact families to cope with problems in connection with separation and divorce. Research on divorce has well documented the consequences of separation and divorce for children and parents (Amato & Booth, 1997; Fthenakis, 1995a, 1995b; Fthenakis et al., 1982; Hetherington, 1999; Lamb et al., 1999; Thompson & Laible, 1999; Thompson & Amato, 1999). During the last ten years a new paradigm regarding the phenomenon of divorce has been introduced which shows that a divorce is not the end of a family, but leads to its reorganisation. Recently the Family-Transition Approach and the Risk and Resiliency Perspective have contributed towards reconceptualizing the phenomenon of divorce as a transition phase in the process of family development. These approaches have provided a theoretical base which is proving to be increasingly helpful for the development and evaluation of intervention measures before, during, and after divorce.

Parallel to this development there has been a paradigm shift in legislation measures. During recent years most established systems of law follow the idea that whereas marriage and partnership may end, parenthood remains lifelong with both parents. Therefore they try to adopt a "philosophy of parental autonomy" and behave very cautiously if the parent's rights are intruded.

The German Federal Constitutional Court for example has set up a guideline that states that a government intervention in parent's law is only permitted if all possible measures have failed to restore impaired parental competence by utilising intervention approaches.

Also the concept of empowerment in youth services calls for a radical shift away from the "protection" of their clients and propagates a model of "human strengths" as a new orientation for professional workers. Since the reformed Child Law of July 1998 has been in effect, the obligation to accept professional guidance has been extended for separated and divorced families in Germany.

The state has partly withdrawn from involvement in divorced families and has agreed upon and approved more or less binding intervention programs to give internal autonomy to the family instead of legal mechanisms. Against this background one can understand that during the past twenty years a series of intervention approaches have been developed, and to a certain extent implemented, and evaluated to meet this paradigmatic change concerning divorced families.

Already since the seventies and early eighties many intervention approaches have been developed and partly evaluated which focus either on partnership or parenthood or children. Relevant review articles have been published by Blaisure & Graesler (1999); Grych & Finchman (1992, 1999); Emery (1999), Glaeser & Blaisure (1998).

For example, during the last ten years programs for divorced parents have been developed to ease transition to joint parenthood. Such programs focus on an education towards mental health. Normally they are short-term measures, limited in time. They utilise directive, didactic approaches regarding the consequences of divorce on children and, at the same time give parents a positive attitude and essential tools for joint parenthood, intending to make the adjustment easier for the children (c. f. Mc Kenry, Clark & Stone, 1999). One can find successful interventions in numerous fields, such as for example prevention of child

abuse, affective disorders of adolescents as well as of parents. The programs have various focuses, but on the whole they try to meet three different options which are: a) mediation of divorce-specific abilities, b) a change of attitudes and c) the training of specific skills. Concerning the structure and organisation of the program there are a number of different approaches; they depend on the quantity and duration of meetings, time, location, cost, format and manner of strategies and techniques. Davidoff & Schiller (1983) recommend a period of 6 to 8 weeks for the adult-focused program and Crosbee- Burnett & Newcomer (1990) recommend 8 to 10 meetings for the child-focused program. The most effective period of time for a session with parents is between 2 and 3 hours and for children less than one hour. Adult groups vary in number from 5 to a maximum of 15 participants and children's groups from 6 to 8.

Within the scope of this paper it is impossible to discuss all existing approaches. Therefore I want to concentrate on three priorities that gained importance during recent years and to give an overall view of the development in the field of divorce intervention. These are a) child- intervention programs, b) educational programs ordered by the court and c) supervised visitation<sup>1</sup>. And, again, details about these interventions are not possible, so I will try to focus on one basic problem of each intervention research that I mention.

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<sup>1</sup> I have to give up my original intention to deal with divorce intervention in this paper, because it is impossible to discuss such a detailed topic in such a short time. However, in my manuscript I pointed to the most important evaluation studies in divorce mediation.

**Australia:**

Bordow, S. & Gibson, J. (1994). Evaluation of the family court mediation service. Sydney: Family Court of Australia Research and Evaluation Unit.

Love, A., Moloney, L. & Fisher, T. (1995). Federally-funded family mediation in Melbourne: Outcomes, costs and client satisfaction. (Office of Legal Aid and Family Services, Attorney-General's Dept., Barton, ACT 2600).

**Austria:**

Bundesministerium für Umwelt, Jugend und Familie (Hrsg.) (1997). Familienberatung bei Gericht - Mediation - Kinderbegleitung bei Trennung der Eltern. Wien: Verlag Österreich.

**Canada:**

Richardson, C. (1988). Court-based divorce mediation in four Canadian cities: An overview of research results. Ottawa, Canada: Department of Justice.

Irving, H. & Benjamin, M. (1992). An evaluation of process and outcome in a private family mediation service. *Mediation Quarterly*, vol. 10, 35-55.

Benjamin, M. & Irving, H. (1995). Research in family mediation: Review and implications. *Mediation Quarterly*, vol. 13, 53-82.

**Germany:**

Ministerium für Familie, Frauen, Weiterbildung und Kunst Baden-Württemberg (Hrsg.) (1995). *Praxisdokumentation zur Familien- und Scheidungsmediation in Baden-Württemberg*.

**USA:**

California:

Depner, C., Cannata, K. & Simon, M. (1992). Building a uniform statistical reporting system:

A snapshot of California Family Court Services. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, vol. 30, 169-184.

Kelly, J. (1990). Mediated and adversarial divorce resolution process: An analysis of post-divorce outcomes. (Final report prepared for the Found for Research in Dispute Resolution, Northern California Mediation Center, 100 Tamal Plaza, Corte Madera, Ca 94925).

Kelly, J. & Duryee, M. (1992). Women's and men's views of mediation in voluntary and mandatory mediation settings. *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, vol. 30, 34-49.

Pearson, J. & Thoennes, N. (1989). Divorce mediation: Reflections on a decade of research. In K. Kressel & D. Pruitt (Eds.), *Mediation research* (9-30). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Donohue, W.A. (1991). *Communication, marital dispute, and divorce mediation*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Virginia:

Emery, R.E., Matthews, S.G. & Wyer, M.M. (1991). Child custody mediation and litigation: Further evidence on the differing views of mothers and fathers. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 59 (3), 410-418.

Emery, R.E., Matthews, S.G. & Kitzmann, K.M. (1994). Child custody mediation and litigation: Parents' satisfaction and functioning one year after settlement. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 62 (1), 124-129.

## **Ad (a) Child-centered programs**

Since the seventies there has been an increasing interest in programs which give support to children to cope with the separation and divorce of their parents. Table 1 is an overview of programs available today. For a number of reasons they take place in the form of group intervention, frequently school-based settings or counselling services (Kalter et al., 1998; Pedro- Carroll & Cowen, 1987)<sup>2</sup>. Most of these programs in-

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Dillon, P.A. & Emery, R.E. (1996). Divorce mediation and resolution of child custody disputes: Long-term effects. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, vol. 66 (1), 131-140.

### Chicago:

Raisner, Joan K. (1997). Family mediation and never-married parents. *Family and Conciliation Court Review*, vol. 35 (1), 90-101.

### Indiana:

Thoennes, N., Pearson, J. & Bell, J. (1991). Evaluation of the use of mandatory divorce mediation. Paper presented at the State Justice Institute, Alexandria, Virginia.

Donohue, W.A., Drake, L. & Roberto, A.J. (1994). Mediator issue intervention strategies: A replication and some conclusions. *Mediation Quarterly*, vol. 11 (3), 261-274.

### **United Kingdom:**

Walker, J., McCarthy, P. & Timms, N. (1994). *Mediation: The making and remaking of co-operative relationships*. Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, Relate Centre for Family Studies.

<sup>2</sup> Group intervention programs for children with separately living or divorced parents appeared isolated in the first half of the seventies (Gardner, 1976). Whereas Wilkinson & Bleak (1977) and Kessler & Bostwick (1977) presented detailed formulated manuals for children groups, the works of Cantor (1977) and Magid (1977) contained little precise dates concerning the performance of groups. Finally a preventive children program - worked out by Holdahl & Casperson (1977) - addressed generally all children but especially considered children coming from divorced families. One year later Green (1978) published the children intervention program "Helping children of divorce", which is supposed to help children to overcome the separation with structured intervention measures. The Green-program directly influenced the later development of programs as of Anderson, Kinney & Gerler (1984) and Crosbie-Burnett & Newcomer (1989, 1990). In the eighties, stimulated by reports which were finished by then and attending to medium-term and long-term impacts of separation and divorce on the development of children, and also motivated by clinical reports, the interest in further developing and evaluating such programs became stronger. At the end of 1994, there were 124 publications concerning group intervention programs registered, among them ten publications originating from the German speaking area. There were nine manuals, 69 articles published in monographs or professional magazines and 36 dissertations in the English speaking area.

In the English speaking area, the development of children programs is generally concentrated on a group of authors, especially on the teams of Stolberg, Pedro-Carroll, Kalter, Gerler, Johnston and Rossiter. In 1981 the Stolberg-team brought forth an intervention program for children aged from 8 to 13. In 1988 the program was revised and in 1991 published. Some of the accompanying articles are about the findings of the Stolberg-team evaluation study. Additionally there are two dissertations which were supervised by Stolberg. Pedro-Carroll improved the Stolberg-program and in 1985 and 1987 brought two manuals forth, which are meant for children aged 7 to 9 and 9 to 11. The evaluation studies of this group of authors will be discussed in three articles. There are also three dissertations supervised by the Pedro-Carroll- team. In 1984 the Kalter-team published a manual. Three evaluation studies and a dissertation inform about their work.<sup>2</sup> There are two articles written by the author-team of Gerler which discuss, next to the program, the findings of two evaluation studies. The information is completed by a dissertation which was supervised by the authors. In 1987 Janet R. Johnston developed an intervention program at the University of Stanford (USA), which she kindly made available to us in a revised and not yet published version of 1993. A study from the year 1985 and two dissertations (Roseby, 1988 and Deutsch, 1989) complete the basis of information<sup>2</sup>. The article of Rossiter (1988) from Toronto/Canada focuses on preschool age children.

Whereas since the beginning of the eighties the development of intervention programs for children in post-divorce situations was consequently followed in the United States (Stolberg, Cullen & Garrison, 1981), in Germany the research became interested in such programs only at the end of the eighties, exceptions are the work of Loddenkemper (1980) and the indications of Fthenakis, Niesel and Kunze (1982). At that time the only reports in Germany were a diploma work from the year 1987 (Beelmann, 1987) and a two volume research report from the author of this study which was about an intervention project for children coming from divorced families, initiated in 1989 by the Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik und Familienforschung in Munich. The latter took the manuals of Stolberg and Pedro-Carroll as a basis (Plattner & Herz, 1990).

On the authors initiative the Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik und Familienforschung continued its work, intending to provide a program for the German speaking area which is supposed to help children in situations of separation and divorce. This work, started in the year 1993, finally lead to the development and experimenting of the present program.

In the following part of this study we would like to give a survey about the present situation of the development in the field of group intervention programs for children of different ages in Germany and other countries and also attend to the connecting questions. For this purpose we listed and evaluated studies until the year 1994.

involve educational and therapeutic activities. The aim is to promote feelings of support, to correct divorce misinterpretation and to provide efficient tools for coping with stress and the challenges in connection with parental divorce. The interventions are limited to about 6 to 16 weeks' duration. The advantage of child-focused group interventions is that a much higher number of children from lower-income levels can participate in the program compared with a single person meeting. Schools are a natural context for support for children. Moreover, divorce-related problems often become manifest in school settings, leading to an accumulation of difficulties and reduced performance at school. Therefore school-based group interventions are able to reduce behavioural disturbances as well as poor achievement.

The "Children of Divorce Developmental Facilitation Group" program can be regarded as a prototype of such programs. This consists of eight sessions, a program which focuses on normalising the experience of divorce, clarifying and working through upsetting and confusing issues related to the divorce, and developing coping strategies for difficult feelings and family interactions. For this program there are two evaluation studies available (Kalter et al., 1984, 1988). Stolberg & Garisson (1985) evaluated the "Divorce Adjustment Project" which included separate 12-week groups for children and their mothers. This program focused on normalising the experience of divorce, understanding and working through divorce-related feelings and issues, developing coping strategies, and parent-child communication. Pedro-Caroll et al. (cf. Alpert-Gillis et al., 1989; Pedro-Caroll & Cowen, 1985; Pedro-Caroll et al. 1986) have further developed the program of Stolberg & Garrison and have produced the "Children of Divorce Intervention Program" (CEDIP). On this basis I have developed together with my staff members for the German speaking region the "Child Group Intervention Program" for children living with separated and divorced parents. This program is widely used in the German speaking region. The program is for children aged 7 to 9, and 9 to 12 years and takes place in 12 weekly sessions of 90 minutes in groups of 6 to 8 children conducted by a male and a female group-leader. Parallel to that there are four meetings with the parents.

Although a number of divorce-related intervention programs for children of divorce have been carried out, empirical evaluation is still limited. One exception are the above mentioned programs from Stolberg and Pedro-Caroll. Summing up the results of the empirical evaluation studies, it has been shown that the results are generally consistent and support the usefulness of school-related divorce interventions. Nevertheless these programs need further development and more empirical evaluation, since most evaluation studies are burdened with methodological problems. Only in very few evaluation studies have the children been randomly chosen, and a control group was introduced in only one study. Most studies were carried out shortly after intervention, an obvious limitation with respect to the preventive function of intervention. Welcome exceptions are a two year follow-up study by Pedro-Caroll et al., (1993) and a one year follow-up study by Stolberg & Mahler (1994). Furthermore there have been only a few attempts carried out to isolate active components of changes and to take into consideration possible intervening variables such as age, gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status (SES), time elapsed after divorce, remarriage and child-specific characteristics (for example, temperament).

In an analysis of the child-and parent-related intervention by Lee et al. (1994) it could be demonstrated that child-focused intervention is more successful with respect to easing children's burdens, or changing their attitude to divorce, and to the elimination of disturbances such as disruptive behaviour at school. School-centred groups seemed to be more helpful, but also restricted with respect to useful intervention for children coping with parental divorce. The development and evaluation of more specific programs examination needs urgent attention in future.

## **Ad ( b)      Interventions for divorced parents**

Since the nineties – at the latest - one can recognise a strong interest in programs for parents experiencing divorce. Programs of this kind implicitly follow three goals: improved psychological adjustment of the parent, improved parenting, and improved family relationships. In practice, most place a primary emphasis on improving adult adjustment, with less emphasis on parenting skills and family relationship issues (Emery et al., 1999). Only during the last five years development in the direction of Educational Programs for divorced parents can be recognised. More than 500 programs are available and have been presented at three conferences in the USA since 1994. In 1998 Gaesler & Blaisure made an analysis of these programs in order to investigate their conceptual basis, their program goals, the themes on which the programs are based, the education strategies and evaluation methods. A few weeks ago the two female authors presented an excellent overview on Divorce Education across the United States (Blaisure & Gloeser, 1999). The following table 2 shows some of the 37 programs which are commercially available. In one content analysis of the 37 divorced education programs used across the USA they found four main thematic focuses for parents (table 3): (a) Personal adjustment with the main focus on the Grief / Loss Cycle, the divorce process and education as aspects, (b) Coping with Change, here with the main focus on divorce adjustment, (c) Parenting, especially co-operative parenting, and (d) Skills and resources (referrals/books, communication, support resources etc.). Child-focused programs (table 4) show two main topics focuses (a) Children's responses to divorce (developmental stages of children; typical reactions of children; impact of divorce on children, etc.). (b) Helping children to cope with divorce (responding to children's distress, harmful interactions, helping children adjust etc.). Court-focused programs (table 5) focus on either the legal proceedings with an emphasis on mediation, legal representation on court procedures etc. or family responsibility, with special emphasis on custody and visitation. Finally, materials such as video recordings are frequently used during these programs. (table 6)

Most commonly programs offer a two hour session which includes a video presentation, a paper and a group discussion attended by either one or both parents. Intervention measures of this kind generally follow the goal of supporting parents and children in coping with the difficulties related to divorce. Concerning the goals parents and children concentrate on the court related result. Suppliers of these programs include contract partners, public and private institutions, therapeutic institutions, or also a combination of court employees and contract partners, or even court employees only. The attendance can be voluntarily, or it can also be ordered by court. Programs on a voluntary or court ordered basis offer essentially similar contents, but court ordered ones concentrate more on the consequences caused by the conflict loaded interactions between parents and children. These kind of intervention often face the dilemma as to which contents and which skills in what particular ratio can be offered within the short time available. The general attitude is that the promotion of skills for improving the parent's behaviour is of central significance. These prove to be more effective than passive strategies such as the use of books or other materials. Competence-oriented intervention programs are able to help divorced parents, to improve their communicative competence as well as their ability to overcome interparental conflicts in an adequate way, competencies which are stable even after a six month period, (Arbuthnot et al. 1997). Two studies present the status of the court ordered divorce intervention measures and contain information about the thematic focuses and procedures (Blaisure et al., 1996).

During the last two years a number of papers have dealt with evaluation questions concerning these programs. (Mc. Kenry et al., 1999; Perkins & Ansay, 1998; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999)

## **Effectiveness of programs carried out in connection with court proceedings**

Most of the court ordered programs are in the process of formative evaluation. The formative evaluation of divorce programs has consisted mostly of questionnaires presented to the attendees after the end of the program. Available results indicate that the participants express a high level of satisfaction; this is also valid for attendees who at first did not wish to attend the program but were finally forced to do so. (Hickey, 1994; Kramer & Washo, 1993; Petersen & Steinmann, 1994). In an analysis of a 3.282 parent survey in Utah, 56% of the parents were at first reluctant to co-operate in the program; 93% were of the opinion that attendance had been worthwhile, and 98% believed that attendance should be made obligatory (Loveridge, 1995). Finally, 92% agreed that the program had widened their understanding with regard to co-operative parenthood, and 90% reported that they planned to strengthen their efforts with regard to co-operation with the other spouse. Similar results were found by Friemann et al. 1994; Hendrix (1995); Sodermann et al., (1996).

One study documented that the parents, after attending the program, stated they now have more positive communication with their ex partners ( Sodermann et al., 1996). Two other studies document an increase concerning the parental willingness to enlist additional services during the adjustment period to divorce. (De Luse et al., 1995; Kramer & Washo, 1993).

Recent studies show that the general effectiveness of parent programs can vary according to the following factors: (a) the level of conflict mentioned by the parents (Kramer, 1996), (b) the duration of program attendance (Arbuthnot et al., 1994; Arbuthnot et al., 1997) and (c) the content presented in the program and the teaching strategies (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996).

Kramer et al., 1996; examined the influence of the program's attendance with respect to the rates of a re-opening of court proceedings 6 years after the divorce. Only very few parents who reported in an early stage a high interparental conflict, a triangle position of the children, and a low level of adaptive parent behavior, profited from the program.

There is evidence that the time of the parent's program attendance can influence the effectiveness of the program. The study shows that 12,5% of the parents who attended the program within three weeks after their first court hearing, reopened the court proceedings within two years, while this happened for 60% of the parents who attended the program four weeks or more after the first court hearing (Arbuthnot et al., 1994). This study suggests that the earlier the parents attend the program the less the conflicts in parental communication hardens. In an attempt to replicate the results Arbuthnot & Gordon repeated the study in another place. The results show an even stronger correlation between program attendance and reopening of the court proceedings for all divorced parents. The correlation between program attendance and reopening of the court proceedings continued also in this study, when the reopening was about the child's right to contact the noncustodial parent but not when child maintenance and custody law was involved (Arbuthnot et al., 1997).

One very recent study about parent programs in 5 locations in the USA showed the following results (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997): (1) There is no evidence that one program type in a consistent way brings better results (there are differences concerning charges, suppliers, number of sessions, the attendance of one or both parents, the duration of the sessions and the organisation of the curriculum). (2) 70% of the attendees found the program helpful with respect to a sensibilisation regarding children's needs. The program also gave them ideas for talking with their children and how listen to them, and taught them which divorce-related information should be shared with the children or not. This effect was still available six months after program attendance. 67 -77% of the parents said that they found the information useful to help the children to overcome difficulties and to structure their social contacts more successfully and pleasantly. (3) Only half of the attendees believed that the suppliers definitely fulfilled their needs; only 40 - 50% expressed optimism with respect to their competence to co-operate with the other parent as a business

partner instead of meeting him on an emotional basis. (4) After six months 24% of the participants said that the program really helped them to improve the parental relationship. Slightly more than 50% said that at least they tried to implement some of the ideas presented in the program. (5) Parents who attended the program and the control group mentioned a comparable level of conflicts concerning contacts and custody. Conflicts concerning decision-making with respect to the children decreased for 14% of the control group and for 34% of the participants of the program. (6) In this study no differences were found between the groups with respect to the frequency of the reopening of the court proceedings.

Most recent research evidence shows that the effectiveness of such programs depends mainly on (a) the level of communication as defined by the parents, (b) the time schedule for parental participation in the program, and (c) the content and mediation strategies of the actual program.

Kramer et al., (1996) checked in a follow-up the frequency of divorced parents who reopened court proceedings after six years. Only a few parents who primarily stated a high inter-parental conflict level, a triangle relationship with the children, and a low level of an adjusted parents' behavior, gained from the program. They mentioned a lower rate of reopening the court proceedings than the members of the control group. Also Arbuthnot et al. (1993) found out that an increase in conflictual parental communication is lessened, the earlier the parents participate in a divorce intervention. This is particularly applicable if there are differences concerning the child's right of contact to the non-custodial parent, but is of less importance if the child's maintenance or custody is involved. In another study Arbuthnot et al. (1996) could demonstrate very clearly that the instruction strategy is an important variable for the examination of program effectiveness.

### **Ad (c) Supervised visitation**

Intervention measures concerning supervised visitation represent a trend within divorce intervention. I am afraid, that there will not be enough time to introduce these programs in detail. So I would like to confine myself to some notes and for further information point to the literature in my paper. Pearson & Thoennes (1997) report, that there are disputes about custody in 10 to 30% of American divorce cases. A long-term high conflict level can be found in a third of divorce cases. Additionally there are reports about an increase of domestic violence in divorce families. A study showed that at least half of the violent husbands were also violent towards their children; it also showed that daughters in households with existing violence between partners are 6.5 times more often victims of sexual abuse than girls in non-violent households (Bowker et. al., 1988). Now many legal systems arrange supervised visitation, in case of affected parent-child-relationships or in case of a dangerous situation for the child. Supervised visitation is the supervision of the contact between child and parent (or another relative) by a third person. Supervised visitation is necessary when the child desires the contact to the parent and is likely to profit from it, but the contact could endanger the child.

For example: although the topic sexual abuse is discussed by children in a controversial manner, children believe that parents who abuse their children are still loving parents (Blick, 1989; Hess & Proch, 1989; James & Gibson, 1990; Klawnsnik, 1993; Steinhauer, 1991). Supervised visitation is meant to guard against the missing self control of parents, protects the child and provides the affection of the parent. In case of an interruption of contacts, the child can be suffering from identity problems or an affection of its self-confidence (Benedek & Benedek, 1977; Horowitz, 1983). Supervised visitation is carried out in several study groups and the form of intervention varies depending on indication (for indications see tables 8,9 &10).

International research discusses such measures of intervention since the eighties and even more so in the nineties. Levy (1992) identifies different kinds of visitation problems, e.g. if the child refuses to have contact with the non-custodial parent. From this he deducts guidelines to formulate programs and recommendations for court. Horowitz (1983) discusses different arguments pro and contra the forced contact between child and parent. Richter & Kreuznacht (1999) discuss in how far the will of the child can be a yardstick for the installment of supervised visitation. Johnston et. al. (1985) describe typical constellations,

in which supervised visitation is recommended (see also Horowitz & Dodson, 1985).

First research findings in the field of supervised visitation are submitted from Canada: a study of 14 programs in the province of Ontario (Abramovitch et. al., 1994, zit. In Straus, 1996) found out, that most of the parents and children were in general satisfied with the program and non-custodial parents found the program more helpful than the juridical system. The judges were also satisfied. They estimated the intervention as advantageous for the families and assumed that supervised visitation could save the courts money and time and could reduce the intervention of police force in disputes of custody and visitation.

A study from the United States (Pearson & Thoennes, 1997) including a survey of 94 programs, questioned 51 judges and administrative persons at the court and 41 employees of the programs. There were 373 child protection cases and 676 family court cases from five different programs evaluated and also 201 parents interviewed. Please note, that the perspective of the child was of no concern in this study.

Since 1995/96 the state of Australia established together with local organizations ten state subsidized places for visitation contact. In 1997 research started and after one year there was an preliminary report presented.

Parents were in general satisfied with the quality of the service, although there were statements that the parents would prefer not to be forced to call on this service and had some reservations against the family courts. In general parents wished more information and more support, more support for them as parents and as a help in communicating with the other parent. Another important issue was the time flexibility of the service. About a third of the parents reported that they learned through supervised visitation how to organize contacts with their children on their own. About one half of the parents whose transfer situations were supervised, thought, that they were able to do this on their own in future.

There was an evaluation in Switzerland of a program which was started in 1985 in Bern and is offered now at 13 places (Staub, 1997). The program organizes the visits, so that several families at the same time are supervised by a few care providers in a meeting center. The empiric study includes a questionnaire among care specialized employees coming from juridical and psychological fields.

In 1986 Bordeaux (France) established the first "Point Rencontre". In the meantime in France there is a net of 63 "Lieux d'Accueil du Droit de Visite". For ten years now they are united within the "Fondation de France". Directed by Benoit Bastard the "Fondation de France" does also scientific research. A detailed documentation was introduced at the First International Conference of supervised Visitation ("Premier Colloque International Sur Les Services d'Accueil du Droit des Visites") in Paris from November 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> 1998.

In 1994 there was the "Fédération de Lieux d'Accueil" established underneath the roof of the "Fondation de France". It consists of a group of representatives of the lieux d'Accueils who discuss and form the ethical basis and the principles of all lieux d'Accueils. The "Ethic Committee" presented at the conference in November 1998 the "Code de Déontologie", which is still in its provisional stage, though. Other standards were explicitly formulated in the United States and in Australia<sup>3</sup>.

### **The Development of Programs for a Supervision of Parent-Child-Contacts**

Until the year 1985 there were no programs concerning supervised visitation between parents and the child. In the United States there are only singular initiatives by judges and social workers, who try to supervise the contact with the child. The first program which received financial aid from the state, was the "Arizona Court-Based Program", as part of a detailed study which aimed at the examination of possibilities of a better creation of relations to the separately living parent. Another program in Indiana also re-

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<sup>3</sup> For the australian standards visit the internet-adress: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~anzaccs/contact.html>



ceived public aid (Hess et. Al. , 1992). The first large-scale research in this field was the “Juridicial Visitation Project”.

The situation changed in the middle of the eighties. Until the beginning of the nineties the demand for supervised visitation increased continually. Two conferences (Rawson et. al., 1991) helped to spread the programs within the United States. The conferences stimulated the exchange and the cooperation between the different independent existing programs (Straus et. al., 1992; Wallach et. al., 1992). A substantial contribution was made by a congress in New York, May 1992. Not only were the programs for supervised visitation in the United States and in Canada presented there, but also the “Supervised Visitation Network (SVN)” was introduced to the professional public (Straus & Wallach, 1992). Since its beginning the SVN coordinates the development and the spread of supervised visitation programs.

Since 1986 in Canada there were several supervised visitation programs financed by the government. They are e.g. the programs which were developed in the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario (Carroll, 1990). Basically the development in Canada can be compared to the United States. Also in Canada at the beginning there was no substantial financial aid for such programs, e.g. for the project “Access for Parents and Children” in Ontario (Dabraio, 1989). Soon, however, the Canadian Government took over the central role in the early stage of development and implementation of supervised visitation programs<sup>4</sup>.

## Typology of Programs

Apart from unpublished programs (see Geyer et. al., 1987; Houghton et. al., 1990) there are also several published supervised visitation programs. For example Cantelon (1992) describes the program for the province of Manitoba. Hess et. al. (1992) describes the program for Indiana and Stocker (1991) the so called Ohio-project. As early as 1986 Hess presented practical guidelines for the relation with the non-custodial parent; Gibson & James (1991) worked out indications for the organization of supervised visitation.

Altogether there are three types of programs with different focal points:

- Programs based on supervision<sup>5</sup>
- Programs based on accompanying the families<sup>6</sup> and/or
- Programs based on support<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 1986 the Canadian Ministry of Justice initiated a study which proves the necessity of such programs (Cantelon, 1992). Another three year study with interdisciplinary character was financed by the government and included the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Families. In 1991 the Government of Ontario provided 2 million dollars to promote such model programs. Until the year 1994 there were already 14 projects financed.

All the proposed supervised visitation programs follow a common aim: (a) provision of a secure field for all members; (b) guarantee for the custodial parent, that the child is safe (especially in cases of abuse); (c) protection of the non-custodial parent from false accusations; (d) documentation of the Parent-child-interaction for the court or experts; (e) Additional supervision for parents to improve the relation to the child.

<sup>5</sup> This kind of supervision is the most intensive and most expensive one. Primary aim of this kind of supervision is the protection of the child. The supervisor is present all the time of the contact between parent and child and watches directly or indirectly (Video) their interaction. He is close to the child and guarantees its safety. This kind of supervision is suitable for families in which sexual abuse is suspected or already proved.

The so called “therapeutic supervision” is another version of supervised programs. The supervision and the guarantee of safety for the child is in general combined with a therapeutic intervention. The treatment is the frame in which the parent-child contact happens. The results of supervision or intervention are not connected to professional discretion and are available, in agreement with all members, to the court and other members of the court proceedings.

<sup>6</sup> The accompanying supervision is a measure with a lesser degree of control. It is suitable for families with a deficiency of parental competence, a high level of conflict, a low level of family violence or psychological problems or abusive behaviors and the child is only indirectly affected.

The development of programs is often still in the beginning phase. They share problems, common to programs in other fields of divorce intervention. Research in this field is also still in the early stages. In future it will be important to provide the development, implementation and evaluation of programs with a detailed conceptual basis and also to improve their implementation and evaluation in a methodical way. Longitudinal studies should investigate the effectiveness and the limits of such interventions. The present level of development and research shows already that more needs to be done in this field. It would be a good chance for IRTAC to choose this field as one of the possible topics for forthcoming conferences.

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<sup>7</sup> The third form of intervention is suitable for families who want to optimize the contact between the child and the parent or other relatives. Although the supervisor is close to the child, the supervision is not primarily meant to guarantee the safety of the child, but to improve the quality of the relation between the child and the parent. This type of program aims in the first place to help build and reconstruct the parent-child-relation and provides aid in overcoming transition difficulties. The supervision can be provided for several families at the same time, e.g. on a playground or other public places. This kind of program is partially also suitable for group programs. All these programs include an institutional and non-institutional part. The latter includes e.g. additional aid for the transport between the parents home and the consultation place.

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