



UL ENGAGE

Community Briefing

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The Children's Grief Centre Project

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UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

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Promoting University Community Collaboration

THE BRIEF

Project Aim

The overall aim of our project was to create a brochure that would give advice to parents who are separated or divorced. This brochure is meant to help with communication between the parents, and the parents and their children.

Project Objectives

The project objectives were to evaluate, to understand, and to teach. When we were first introduced to the centre, we had to evaluate the state of which the centre ran and what needed to be done. When the brochure became the main project, we spoke with Sister Helen many times to understand what the children are going through, as well as the parents. The overall objective of the brochure though, was to teach. We wanted to express to parents ways of communicating with their ex spouses and children during a tough time.

Project Rationale

This project is being undertaken because of the continuing issue with parents not knowing how to help their children outside of the centre walls. Often, Sister Helen and her volunteers have had to spend more time with parents who do not know what to do, rather than forming the supportive bond with the child. This in turn affects the environment of the centre and does not accomplish the goal. The community then has more difficulties of children growing up without this type of support, which may be necessary.

COMMUNITY

Overview of Community Organisation

For this Autumn semester of the practicum, we worked with the Children's Grief Centre, a local organization designed to help children who come from separated, divorced, or bereaved families. Founded by Sister Helen Chulhane in September 2009, it's mission and target is to help the children of Limerick. Sister Helen saw that Limerick is the city in Ireland with the highest divorce rates and wanted to help the children of Limerick. It is a support centre that aims to help children of the ages 4-18. The logo, which is shown below, is at the front of the centre and it shows the name of the centre and the compassionate heart.



Community Partners



Our co-ordinator Helen Culhane who is also a Sister and has a background in Social Work. She founded the centre in September 2009 and has continued to work here ever since.

STUDENTS



Sabrina DiStefano- SUNY New Paltz

My name is Sabrina DiStefano and I am from Staten Island, New York. I am in my third year of college at SUNY New Paltz which is in upstate New York. I decided to major in psychology as soon as I entered college because I have always wanted to be a clinical psychologist with the hopes of moving onto forensics. I have a double minor in Deaf Studies and Sociology, which has allowed me to further my knowledge on communicating and interacting with people. Since I am studying a social science, it drew me to the Grief Centre because of the work that Helen and her staff does for the children. I am overly joyed with the work that my partner and I did this semester and it made my study abroad experience one I will never forget!



Emma Dwyer – Eastern Illinois University

I have been raised for the past 20 years in a tiny village right outside Chicago, Illinois. I decided to study Psychology at my university because of my investment in the support of the mental health community. I later decided to minor in Neuroscience because of the strong relationship between the human brain functions and our emotional states. When I saw the Autumn Practicum offered a project that involved the support of children during confusing times, I was immediately drawn in. I am happy to say that it was worth it, this past semester.

OUTCOMES

Our part of the project was to create a brochure/pamphlet to give advice, do's, and don'ts on how parents should communicate with each other and with their children after a divorce or separation.

After meeting with Helen for our last official meeting, it was noted how much of an impact our project has made on the Grief Centre. While creating the brochure, Helen told us that this would help the parents of those who are recently divorced with their communication skills. After we completed our part of the brochure Helen described that the brochure will give families a better chance of healing because of the new do's and don'ts on communication we suggested.

The community can then run more smoothly without the tensions of families!

TESTIMONIALS

We did not get any specific comments from those we were working with this semester but they seemed very pleased with our work and all we did for the Grief Centre. We never had to have any meetings with Helen or anyone to give us more motivation to work, we were always on top of our assignments and what we needed to do. We mostly only had communication and meetings with Helen. Overall, we believe and hope that our community partners and the rest of the staff were happy with our work.

Claudine O'Dowd- Play therapist:

Ms. O'Dowd was very eager to answer the questions we had for her to make our video. She wanted to help with our video as much as possible. With her excitement, it showed that she was proud of our work.



Anne English:
Administration

Ms. English works in the administrative aspects of the Grief Centre and also was eager to give answers for our video project. Her eagerness as well as Claudine O'Dowd continue to give us the motivation to give 100 percent to this project.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Have constant communication with Sister Helen or one of her volunteers and have weekly meetings with your partner to keep up to date.
- Visit the Children's Grief Centre regularly to get a good sense of what the centre means to everyone involved.
- Do research on your own time.
- Don't wait the whole semester to get the project started.
- Use creative side to complete brochure.
- Talk to Sister Helen about any questions you may have.
- Break up the responsibilities

GALLERY



Emma and I at the front of the Grief Centre which is located at the Catherine Macaulay School. We are standing in front of the Centre's logo, the compassionate heart.



This is the waiting room where Helen, Emma, and I usually had our meetings. It is the waiting room for parents to wait for their children to be finished with their support session. In this room there are brochures that help the parents deal with divorce. This is where our brochure will be displayed.



This is a picture of one of the children's play room. In this room a child, or teen, will have the free and open space to play, color, draw, and be able to talk to the play therapist if wanted.



This is another children's play room, and just like the one above, it is meant to give the children and teens a sense of freedom. It is a safe environment for them to talk and express their feelings.

<p>Don't's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't negatively talk about the other parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't let your family members/friends talk negatively about your ex to your children. • Don't make last minute changes without speaking to the other parent. • Don't push the kids to talk about the divorce if they do not want to. • Don't break appointments or be late <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not make promises that you cannot keep (i.e. promising your child you will take them to the movies and do not follow through with these plans). • Don't burden your child by condemning your ex. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the child initiates a conversation about your ex, remain neutral. • Don't share all of your anxious or upsetting feelings with your child. • Don't pretend like things will not be change. • Don't let your child act out/not follow rules because of guilt about the divorce. • Don't make your child feel guilty for spending time with their other parent. 	<p>Empowering your Children</p> <p>Tommy was young when his mummy and daddy decided to separate. Even though he was 5 he still understood most of what was happening but his parents did not tell him everything. He often felt lonely and was nervous to bring up the other parent in worry that his mummy would be mad at him. He never wanted to visit his mummy because his daddy didn't like that. Through visiting the Grief Centre Tommy started to feel better. He wasn't nervous anymore to talk to his mummy and daddy and remembered that they still love him. Even though he doesn't live with his mummy and daddy in one house, he has two homes both with parents who love him very much!</p>	<p>The Children's Grief Centre</p>  <p>“A Place for your Children to Express their Thoughts and Feelings”</p> 
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Do's cont.

- Seek support for yourself during this time, take time to relax and do not forget your own health.
- Allow the child to express how they are feeling:
 - If wanting to question about support find creative ways to do it (i.e. coloring, storytelling, drawing).
- Provide age appropriate answers to their questions.
- Whenever possible make the child come first and assure them that what happened is NOT their fault..
- **"I JUST WANT A NORMAL FAMILY"**
 - Is often a common phrase that children say after their parents get divorced
 - it is important to tell them that they are still a **FAMILY**. All families can look different.
- You can't control everything in life but you can control the way you **COMMUNICATE** with your child

Do's

- Practice effective **co-parenting** (working as a team rather than as adversaries) or in case of intense conflicts, parallel parenting (minimizing the contact between the parent).
- As new spouses or relationships begin, it is important that the child has a relationship with their biological parent and not feel pushed aside.
- Try and include them in decision-making when possible, particularly with decisions that directly affect them
- It is important that the child has a relationship with both parents.
- Be emotionally sensitive to your child during transitions to different households.
- Maintain stable and consistent schedules in young children
 - These schedules will need to become more flexible as the child becomes older.
- Minimize the number of changes children face and clearly explain these changes.

Introduction

In the time of separation or divorce, children pick up the stress or atmosphere in their families. They can sense the tension and often feel afraid to talk to their parents. They are often confused and worried about the situation. It is very common for a child to have a mixture of sadness and relief when parents separate. Children often feel lonely a sense of absence when their parent isn't around. Research tells us that **continuous conflicts** between parents can lead to struggles for the child or young person later on in life. This booklet is used to show the importance of communication between parent and child.

COMMUNITY VIDEO

Our community project was the Children's Grief Centre. We worked with the centre's director, Sister Helen throughout the semester and some of the people she works with. We were assigned to produce a brochure for the centre that would help parents better communicate with their children and spouses after a separation or divorce.

The importance of our project is due to the fact that Limerick is one of the highest rated cities in Ireland for divorce. That being said, the centre has seen over 1,000 children since its birth in 2009 and they believe that the more information that is out there for the parents will only help. The centre has a belief that good communication with children and parents through rough times will lead to much healthier relationships.

After we spoke with Sister Helen about all of this, we decided that a brochure should be made that would sit in the waiting room with the parents while their child or children were in a session with Helen or one of the volunteers. The brochure entailed our own research on what seem to be the do's and dont's when trying to maintain healthy relationships during times of divorce. Within the brochure we have a title page that says, "A place for your children to express their thoughts and feelings" along with the centre's logo. The second page describes an introduction of what is to come within the brochure. The following two pages entail the "Do's" for parents during this time and of course the following page shares the "Dont's". We finished off our creative brochure by writing a "success" story entitled, "Empowering your Children". We spoke of a young boy who felt lonely and sad after the divorce of his parents. After attending the grief centre the young boy felt more comfortable and less nervous about telling his parents how he feels. /

The two of us met every Wednesday this semester to keep up with new ideas and research for this project. Sabrina was in charge of emailing everyone, keeping appointment and maintaining good communication and Emma was in charge of making sure there was transportation to and from the centre each time we visited. The plan going forward is to give Helen the money we raised and keep in contact with her over the progress of the brochure through the next spring semester.

Video submission link: <https://media.heanet.ie/secure/file/266769cf92fc8716af0a4c1a9ea0874b>



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