

Group Interventions Following Divorce: Helping men to cope



MEN AND THE DIVORCE PROCESS

WHY THIS MATTERS

Few interventions have been designed to support men coping with divorce. Yet, men mourn a lost relationship differently than women and are at similar risks for diminished mental health after a divorce.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 37.1% of marriages are expected to end in divorce by their 30th anniversary in BC.
- Divorced men are 6 times more likely to experience depression than married men.
- 20% of women and 14% of men disclose having experienced inter-partner violence during the relationship or after the separation.
- Only 15% of children have their primary residence at their father's home.

- Divorce is associated with multiple losses and transitions over time.
- Men are more likely to feel and be isolated after a divorce.
- Social norms shape men's mourning after divorce through definitions of masculinity, lesser recognition of men's losses, etc.
- Mourning typically starts after the separation is enacted for men. They tend to grieve more about family routine and life, or their children and less about the loss of their partner.
- Men are more likely to act out, feel angry or express themselves through somatisation, actions and/or drug and alcohol use.
- Red flags for post-separation violence: previous assaults, drinking and/or using drugs, control issues, excessive jealousy, and emotional dependence.

Many group interventions have not yet really taken into consideration gender based ways of dealing with divorce and have focused on women's experiences.

GROUP INTERVENTIONS – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- ❑ Overall, interventions are helpful in improving mental health and coping skills and increasing self-esteem and conflict-resolution skills.
- ❑ Each client needs a different type of help at different times: education, emotional support, processing grief.
- ❑ More sessions and small groups (max. 7 participants) are helpful.
- ❑ Feeling accepted by the group, sharing one's experience and increased self-understanding are important for male participants.
- ❑ Men rely on an active group leader who provides guidance.
- ❑ Interventions promoting forgiveness might help in reducing men's anger after a divorce.
- ❑ Caution: in most studies women were over-represented.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ The group needs to be responsive to its member's needs to address their concerns at the right time.
- ❑ While dealing with the legal aspects of the divorce, men are more likely to seek educational interventions. Typically only once the separation is enacted, they will be interested in a more therapeutic group.
- ❑ Social expectations and myths around masculinity, and men and divorce and grief should be discussed.
- ❑ Interventions promoting forgiveness can be included as appropriate and are one avenue to help men deal with anger towards their ex-partner.
- ❑ Men's mourning simply looks different. Men are more likely to act out, use drugs or alcohol, express anger. They might be more willing to discuss the loss of family life and routine than the loss of their partner.

This research was part of the Youth and Family Community Research Exchange, supported by the Victoria Foundation, UVic and the Centre for Youth & Society.