

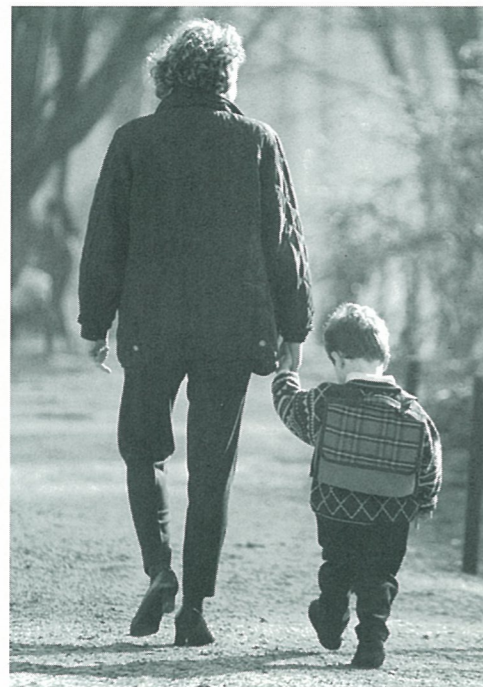
Families In Transition Programs Help Children Dealing with Separation, Divorce and Remarriage

These family changes can create challenges for the whole family - especially children. The Families in Transition (FIT) program at Family Service Association of Toronto helps children and their parents adjust to the changing family circumstances. Based on the experiences of thousands of families, and backed by two major research studies that document the effectiveness of the program, FIT has developed a wide range of services that benefit children.

FIT offers many kinds of therapeutic groups for children and parents: support programs for non-residential parents, individual and family counselling, educational seminars, closed mediation of parenting plans, and programs for remarrying and blending families. These programs help reduce parental conflict, create co-parenting relationships that work, help children grieve, improve

parent/child relationships, and promote successful step-parenting.

Research demonstrates that interventions are more effective when both parents work with the counsellor. For this reason, when a parent contacts FIT, staff members discuss ways in



which the other parent might become involved in the process. If one parent is unavailable, FIT staff will work with the parent who called them.

All FIT staff members are experienced professional social workers or psychotherapists who have worked with changing families for many years. They have post-graduate education at the Master's or Doctoral level in addition to their training in child development, grief work, and conflict resolution.

In addition to their clinical practice, FIT staff are also involved in social policy work on issues relevant to changing families. Recent initiatives in this area include child support guidelines, proposals for decision-making about caring for children, and a parent re-introduction research project.

Drawing from their research and clinical experience, the FIT team recommends the following strategies for parents supporting their child's adjustment to the changing family circumstances:

- **Reduce the conflict:** No matter how angry you might be with your former partner, build a new partnership that focuses on the business of parenting.
- **Put understandings in writing:** Develop a parenting plan or written contract that outlines the various parenting responsibilities. The agreement should also include a plan for resolving disputes, should they occur.
- **Implement easy ways to communicate about children.** Many parents use a journal. It goes between parents' homes with the child and summarizes important information such as upcoming events, school report card dates, medical concerns, extra-curricular activities, etc.

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• **Focus on children at transfers.** Make them a conflict-free zone for children. Conduct parenting business at other times.

• **Develop systems to support your adjustment to the family changes.** How well parents cope with transition, influences how children adjust. Support systems range from close friends and family to participation in more formal groups, educational programs, or counselling.

• **Use business-like language that respects children and the people in their lives.** The language of parenting - mother, father, child works well.

Adjectives such as "custodial", "access," and "visiting rights" contribute to the escalation of conflict.

- **Give children time and the psychological freedom to develop ongoing relationships with both parents.** When there are safety concerns, arrangements can often be modified so that children have the opportunity to be connected to both parents.
- **Support children's grieving.** Divorce is a solution to the problems between adults. Children rarely see it that way. Ensure that children know feeling sad and even crying are normal responses to parental separation.
- **Divorce is complex and there is a great deal to learn.** Become an informed consumer and consider attending a seminar or workshop.

For more information and a complete list of F.I.T. seminars and workshops, visit the FSA Toronto web site at www.fsatoronto.com or call (416) 585-9151.

GUHD Promotes Healthy Development for Downtown Children



In its seventh year of operation, the Growing Up Healthy Downtown (GUHD) partnership continues to provide programming and to undertake

community development work in collaboration with parents, caregivers and children (0-6 years of age) who are living in downtown Toronto. GUHD strives to decrease environmental stresses that negatively impact healthy child development and to improve access to culturally appropriate non-stigmatizing resources for parents and caregivers. The partnership consists of eight agencies and serves hundreds of families and children

each year. Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA) is the sponsor agency and hosts the project co-ordinator, Dianne Loucks.

GUHD currently runs 56 programs dealing with healthy child development, support for women having babies, nutrition, community development, family support, education and resources, and needed changes to the service system. Dianne and the GUHD team also have

several new initiatives underway.

One example is the GUHD web site. Construction on the site is close to completion. The new site will be an easy-to-access central source of project and programming information. It will link to all partner web sites, including www.fsatoronto.com. Check out the progress at www.growinguphealthy.com.

Dianne is particularly excited about GUHD's participation in a proposal for

funding from the United Way's Success by Six Program. The proposal, led by the Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood Association, outlines plans for work with children in settlement communities. The plans include outreach home visits to newcomer families, school readiness programming and parent sessions to promote a link with available community services and to enhance children's learning readiness before they begin school.



For program details and a new GUHD brochure call Dianne Loucks at 416-586-9777 ext.224.