

MU researchers develop digital solutions to support divorced families

December 1 2009



Lawrence Ganong is a professor and co-chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies in the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. Credit: MU News Bureau

Conflict between parents, before and after divorce, is associated with feelings of anger, helplessness, loneliness and guilt in children. Now, an online program created by University of Missouri researchers is teaching separated parents to maintain and nurture relationships with their children. After completion of the course, parents reported improved relationships and better awareness of separation-related problems and how to solve them.

More than half of all marriages end in divorce, and the majority of these involve [children](#), according to the National Center for Health Statistics. Conflict between [parents](#), before and after divorce, is associated with feelings of [anger](#), [helplessness](#), loneliness and guilt in children. Now, an online program created by University of Missouri researchers is teaching separated parents to maintain and nurture relationships with their children.

"There is a great need for effective online programs to support and educate separated parents," said Larry Ganong, co-chair of Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) in the College of Human Environmental Sciences. "In many cases, parents who divorce also move apart, and relocation makes it difficult to attend court-mandated trainings or develop effective strategies for co-parenting. Children are often the ones who suffer when parents don't take steps to minimize issues caused by separation."

HDFS researchers developed Focus on Kids Online, a training course that helps parents going through divorce build stronger, more supportive relationships with their children. The Web-based program is designed to offer parents an alternative to in-person trainings. After completion of the course, parents reported improved relationships and better awareness of separation-related problems and how to solve them, according to new HDFS research by David Schramm, assistant professor, and Graham McCaulley, HDFS doctoral student.

The face-to-face version of Focus on Kids satisfies the Missouri law that requires parents who are divorcing to attend an educational program. It is conducted in cooperation with Missouri's circuit courts and available in 50 counties. Ganong says the online program is growing and will be made available to other states in the future.

The MU researchers offer tips for separated and divorced parents:

- Avoid criticizing the other parent and arguing in front of children.
- Reassure children that [conflict](#) and [divorce](#) are not their fault.
- Plan relaxing activities for kids to make transitions between households less stressful.
- Establish consistent routines and responsibilities in each household.
- Avoid using the child as a messenger - discuss parenting and financial issues directly.
- Avoid asking questions about other parent, which can make children uncomfortable.

More information: The Focus on Kids curriculum incorporates more than 13 years of MU research and findings from national studies, which can be found by visiting the MissouriFamilies Web site at missourifamilies.org/fok

Source: University of Missouri-Columbia ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: MU researchers develop digital solutions to support divorced families (2009, December 1) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-mu-digital-solutions-divorced-families.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.