



Issues in Contemporary Family Structures Grade 8

UNIT OVERVIEW

Lessons & Duration

- [A\) Characteristics of a Strong Family](#) 90 minutes
[B\) The Challenges of Family Breakdown](#) 80 minutes

Description

This unit looks at the characteristics that define a strong family. Then it examines the stress and challenges experienced by children and their parents when the family structure changes due to divorce, annulment or separation. Finally it asks students to identify ways in which the family can stay strong and hopeful in the face of family breakdown.

Background Information

A discussion of family breakdown can be a very difficult experience for both the teacher and the students. It is important to keep students focused on hope in the face of sorrow. For this reason, the unit begins with a look at the characteristics of a strong family. During lesson 2, the focus is then on how a family can find a positive way to grow through the pain and sorrow of family breakdown. Students will find it easier to engage in the activity of finding ways to cope with the negative effect of family breakdown if they have acquired a sense of the family as a place of strength and a source of hope as depicted in lesson one.

It is also important to present students with a positive image of marriage; a marriage that grows out of a mature decision to live and love with your spouse for life. To assist the teacher in this task, a number of teacher resources have been provided in the resource section, as well as a list of web links to the most up to date research with regard to divorce/annulment and separation. All resources are in keeping with Catholic teaching.

Catholic Graduate Expectations

An effective communicator who :

- presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others
- listens actively and creatively to understand and learn in light of Gospel values

A reflective, creative and holistic thinker who :

- recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential to facing all challenges

As self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner who :

- demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others.
- Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities

A collaborative contributor who;

- Respects the rights, responsibilities and contributions of self and others.

A caring family member who;

- Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner.

Family Life Expectations

Students will be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of strong families and apply them to the everyday challenges of family living.
- demonstrate a knowledge of the impact on the family of (family break-down)divorce/annulment/separation and identify ways in which the family can remain the primary source of wellbeing, spiritual renewal, emotional security and love for its members.

Assessment and Evaluation

Performance task: Students will demonstrate through role-play the ability to apply the characteristics of a strong family to real life situations.

Paper and Pencil Task: Assessment of Web of family structure and strengths.

Personal Communication: Journal reflection used to assess the students' ability to identify their personal strengths and those family members they can rely on for support in the face of family breakdown.

Paper and Pencil Task: Assessment of Worksheet "Christian Families Reaching Out" (see appendix C)

Links to Fully Alive

The following 2 lessons link to Theme 2: Living in Relationship - Topic 2: Family.

Lessons 1 and 2 of this unit are intended to bracket Lesson 1 already present in the teachers manual of Fully Alive (p. 41). The new outline is as follows

1. complete lesson one of this new unit – *Characteristics of a Strong Family*
2. complete lesson 1 – *Fully Alive Teacher Manual*, page 41-43.
3. complete new lesson 2 - *Negative Effects of Family Break-Down*
4. Continue theme 2 as outlined in the teacher manual page 42 – *Discovery*.

Note: As you go through the subsequent lessons of theme 2, refer back to the characteristics of strong families where appropriate. In grade 7 students study the important role the family plays in the development of the child. You may wish to refer back to the content of this lesson during this unit.

Suggestions for Accommodations

Lesson 1: webbing - Some students may find it difficult to draw and create a web of their family as outlined in lesson 1. Pair them with another artistic student who can help them draw a web or provide a web sheet that can be filled in rather than created.

Lesson 1: dramatization – Students who have great difficulty with drama could be given an alternate task of writing an editorial critiquing how well the students depicted appropriate ways of dealing with the situation. They are also to describe what they would have done instead and why.

Blackline Masters

- BLM 1: The Characteristics of a Strong Family
- BLM 2: Role-Play Scenarios
- BLM 3: Dear Abby
- BLM 4: Culminating Activity :Youth Guidelines

Teacher Resource Appendices

- APPENDIX 1 Sample Role Play Rubric (assessment)
- APPENDIX 2 Sixty selected qualities in lasting families in the United States and Canada: Research Findings
- APPENDIX 3 Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions
- APPENDIX 4 Catholic Teaching on Divorce and
- APPENDIX 5 Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences

Additional Resources

In Love for Life! A reflection paper on the conjugal, social and religious significance of Marriage. Catholic Organization for Live and Family. CCCB Publications. ISBN 0-88997-475-6

Provides a very positive and clear understanding of marriage from both a legal and sacramental perspective. Contains some statistics on the frequency of divorce and separation in Canada today as well as some information about the effects of separation on the family (both marital and common law) and on children.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: Part III The Love Of Husband And Wife
(#2360-#2391)

Youth Update. *When Divorce Divides: How Can You Cope?*
www.americancatholic.org. Teachers may wish to order copies of this issue to distribute to students who are experiencing grief associated with family breakdown. It provides information about the Catholic understanding of marriage and provides strategies to assist youth in understanding and coping with the emotional stress of divorce/annulment and separation.

Families: Messengers of compassionate love of Christ. Catholic Organization for Live and Family. CCCB Publications

This resource honours the stability offered individuals within the family, but acknowledges the fragile nature of families today, which often experience the separation of divorce. It invites single parents to stay faithful to their mission by choosing to love even in the midst of adversity.

Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences: Dr. Anne Marie Ambert
<http://www.vifamily.ca/library/publications/divorce.html>

Strength in Families: Dr. Benjamin Schlesinger Vanier Institute of the Family;
<http://www.vifamily.ca/library/facts/facts.html>

One Parent Families: Characteristics, Causes, Consequences, and Issues. Dr. Anne Marie Ambert Vanier Institute of the Family;
<http://www.vifamily.ca/library/facts/facts.html>

Family Facts. Downloaded from the Vanier Institute of the Family;
<http://www.vifamily.ca/library/facts/facts.html>

Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences: Dr. Anne Marie Ambert
<http://www.vifamily.ca/library/publications/divorce.html>

Websites

www.vifamily.ca - The Vanier Institute of the Family.

Here you will find a series of occasional papers commissioned by the *Vanier Institute for the Family* and authored by leading Canadian experts in the field of family studies. are the following papers that are related to this . In particular under *Contemporary Family Trends* see: 1) Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences; 2) One Parent Families: Characteristics, Causes and Consequences and Issues;3) Strength in Families: Accentuating the Positive.

www.colf.ca - Catholic Organization for Life and Family.

This organization is a independent group funded and approved by the Knights of Columbus and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. It offers easy to read pamphlets and brochures on many issues related to family life and life issues such as stem cell research, abortion, euthanasia and Marriage.

www.americancatholic.org - American Catholic

This website offers small pamphlets on many Catholic issues including information for teachers (Catholic Update) and to students (Youth Update). The student leaflets are an excellent resource for student research and reflection.

Issues in Contemporary Family Structures Grade 8

Lesson One

CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRONG FAMILY

[top](#)

Description

This lesson invites students to become familiar with the characteristics of a strong family and to apply these characteristics to challenging family situations.

Materials

- BLM 1 The Characteristics of a Strong Family
- BLM 2 Role-Play Scenarios
- TRA 1 Role-Play Checklist (assessment)
- TRA 2 Sixty Selected Qualities in Lasting Families

Notes to Teacher

This lesson serves as an introduction to Fully Alive theme 2, topic 2 –the family. Students will learn that strong families have the ability to face challenges that alter the family structure while remaining a source of hope and security for its members. It is hoped that this lesson will support students as they explore the challenges of family break-up discussed in lesson 2 below.

Catholic Graduate Expectations

An effective communicator who :

- (a) listens actively and creatively to understand and learn in light of Gospel values
- (c) presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others

A collaborative contributor who;

- (e) Respects the rights, responsibilities and contributions of self and others.

A caring family member who;

- (a) Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner.

Learning Expectation

Students will be able to : Identify the characteristics of strong families and apply them to the everyday challenges of family living.

Assessment Opportunities:

Performance task: Students will demonstrate through role-play the ability to apply the characteristics of a strong family to real life situations.

Paper and Pencil Task: Assessment of *Web* of family structure and strengths.

TEACHING / LEARNING STRATEGIES

- 1) **Brainstorm :** Students brainstorm a list of characteristics that describe strong families (see list in teacher resources for ideas).
 - a. You may want to start the activity by asking students to name 2 or 3 characteristics while you record them on chart paper.
 - b. Then have students work in pairs or small groups to extend the list as much as they can.
 - c. After sufficient time has passed, students share their additions and these are added to the original list started by the teacher.

- 2) Provide students with a copy of **BLM 1** *The Characteristics of a Strong Family*, (Vanier Institute for the Family). Discuss each characteristic, being sure to provide or elicit from the students practical examples of each. This will ensure students understand what these characteristics look like in their everyday interactions with their family.

- 3) Ask students the following questions:
 - Are any characteristics from the student-generated characteristics different from the list generated by the Vanier Institute?
 - Is it realistic to expect a family to demonstrate all of these characteristics? Why? Why not?
 - Why might it be important to understand what makes families strong?

(The intent here is to help students realize that knowing what makes families strong gives us ideas about how we can interact in family life to bring hope and happiness to all members. Family life is challenging at times and members need strategies to help them see the good in every situation, to act in a manner that will support the family, and to identify the kind of family they might like to form later in life.)

- 4) **Role-Play:** Provide the students with copies of **BLM 2** *Role-Play Scenarios*.
 - a. Arrange students into groups of 4 or 5.
 - b. Students read over the scenarios, and then create an additional scenario based on a challenging moment in family life.
 - c. Student groups share their new scenario with the whole class.

- d. Assign one scenario to each group to prepare a dramatic presentation. You may also wish to allow students to use their own scenario if it is appropriate.
 - e. Go over the requirements of the activity as outlined on Blackline Master 8.2.
- 5) **Notes:** Either provide students with a handout containing the list of characteristics of strong families, or have students copy the list in their notebooks.
- 6) **Connecting with the parents** Encourage students to share this list with their families.

Optional Activity

Webbing : Students create a web of family relationships including the extended family, identifying those who are closest to them using proximity. In point form next to each family member students describe the core strengths of the relationship and what makes that person important to them. Encourage them to use the list of characteristics of a strong family to reflect on each relationship.

BLM 1**THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A STRONG FAMILY**

The following is a summary of some of the research that has been conducted on the family identifying those characteristics that make families strong and enable them to work through the challenges of family life.

Strong Family Relationship Characteristics: (*Strong Families: A portrait*, by Ben Schlesinger, The Vanier Institute of the Family.)

- Create a sense of positive family identity;
- Promote satisfying and fulfilling interactions among family members;
- Encourages the development of the potential of the family group and individual family members;
- Contributes to the family's ability to deal effectively with stress and crisis, and;
- Contribute to the family's ability to be supportive of other families.

Characteristics of a Strong family: (*Secrets of Strong Families*, Nick Stinnett and John DeFrain.)

- **Commitment:** Members of strong families are dedicated to promoting each other's welfare and happiness. They value the unity of the family
- **Appreciation:** members of strong families show appreciation for each other a great deal.
- **Communication:** Members of strong families have good communication skills and spend a lot of time talking with each other.
- **Time:** strong families spend time – quality time in large quantities – with each other.
- **Spiritual wellness:** Whether they go to formal religious services or not, strong family members have a sense of a greater good or power in life, and that belief gives them strength and purpose.
- **Coping ability:** Members of strong families are able to view stress or crises as an opportunity to grow.

Strong Families: American studies: (Strong and DeVault)

- Work for the well-being, or defend the unity and continuity, of their families;
- Support each other;
- Respect each family member for his/her uniqueness and difference;
- Spend time together to build family cohesion;
- Delegate responsibility;
- Allow children to make mistakes and face the consequences;
- Contribute to the well-being of their neighbourhood, city, country or world;
- Have a spiritual orientation or a spiritual dimension (which may not be the same as religiosity).

BLM 2**Role-Play Scenarios****Instructions:**

Using the information you have learned about the characteristics of strong families, prepare to enact one of the following scenarios. You will need a narrator who will read the scenario prior to enactment, present your group's decision on how the situation should be resolved after the enactment and take suggestions from the whole class. Then your group will act out an appropriate solution to the situation based on either your previous decision. If you wish, you may include some of the suggestions from provided by the class.

Scenario 1: The police found Mary playing in a restricted area of a building sight. This constitutes trespassing on private property. Playing on a construction sight is very dangerous and could result in injury or death. The police officer brought her home and asked her father to discipline her appropriately. How might parent and child resolve this situation in a positive manner?

Scenario 2: Mr. Anderson has worked overtime every night and on Saturdays for the last month. His son Tosh and daughter Allannah really miss all the fun they use to have with there father, especially their Saturday night game night. One evening when he is home, the children ask him to play a game with them. Mr. Anderson is very tired and just wants to watch T.V. How might the family resolve this situation in a positive way?

Scenario 3: Sharmala has just moved to Canada from Africa to live with her new adopted family. Sometimes she feels like an outsider. Her new brothers Liam and Steven are much older then her. Even though her new parents are very loving, she often feels alone and separate from the rest of the family. Her brothers are upset that she always stays in her room instead of joining them in the family room. This evening, Sharmala's new parents are busy cleaning up after supper, she is sitting in her bedroom reading a book, while her brothers are talking and laughing in their bedroom next door. What might be done to bring this family closer together?

Your Groups Scenario (be prepared to share with the whole class)

APPENDIX 1

Sample Role Play Rubric

Group: _____ Date: _____ Criteria	Little Evidence	Some Evidence	Good Evidence	Strong Evidence
1. Members shared equally in the creation and presentation of role play. Comments:				
2. Demonstrated an understanding of the kinds of challenges that can face a family in the creation of their own scenario. Comments:				
3. Represented the challenge to family with accuracy Comments:				
4. Applied two or more characteristics of a strong family to the situation. Comments:				
5. Solutions to the challenge to the family was practical and affective Comments:				
6. Incorporated the ideas of the audience into their final solution.				

Comments:				
7. Expressed ideas, thoughts, and feelings non-verbally. Comments:				
8. Demonstrated creativity. Comments:				
9. Demonstrated problem-solving techniques. Comments:				

Additional Comments

APPENDIX 2

Sixty selected Qualities in Lasting Families in the United States and Canada: The Research Findings. Source: Schlesinger and Schlesinger (1987:30)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptation • Affection shown • Agree on aims and goals • Appreciation for each other • Altruism • Balance in life • Children getting along well • Commitment • Communication is open • Compromise • Confide in each other • Cope with crisis • Curious • Efficiency • Empathy • Exchange ideas • Expressive • Family rules clear • Fidelity • Firm parental coalition • Friendship • Generational boundaries clear • Give and take • Good models in family • Hard work • Have a relaxed rhythm • High spontaneous agreement • Honesty • Humour • Independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in children genuine • Laugh together • Work at relationships • Least use of authoritarianism • Listen • Love • Loyalty • Maintains community relations • Patience • Power structure well defined • Promote each others well-being • Reciprocity • Religious orientation • Relations with adult children good • Respect each other • Roles in family adaptable • Sense of play • Sexuality satisfying • Shared responsibility • Seeks help with problems • Spontaneous interaction • Strong kinship bonds • Support each other • Teaches a sense of right and wrong • Time is spent together • Trust each other • Understanding • Values service to others • Wants relationships to succeed • Well developed ego-strengths
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The limitations of the studies include the following:

- They are mostly middle-class samples
- They consist mostly of white, educated persons
- There is very little `ethnic' variation in their sample populations
- Most were completed in the 1980's, and little has been done in the 1990's
- Most are American based, and we have very few Canadian studies related to strengths in families
- Some of the samples were quite small
- We do not have any longitudinal studies in this area
- We have almost no cross-cultural comparisons on this topic

- On the other hand they give us a good glimpse into the lives of strong families.

Issues in Contemporary Family Structures Grade 8

Lesson Two

THE CHALLENGES OF FAMILY BREAKDOWN

[top](#)

Description

- Students will identify some of the challenges of family break-down (divorce/annulment/separation) on the stability and well-being of the family.
- Using problem-solving skills, they will apply the characteristics of a strong family to various issues related to family breakdown.

Materials

- **BLM 3** Dear Abby
- **BLM 4** Culminating Activity: Youth Guidelines
- **TRA 3** Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions About Family Breakdown
- **TRA 4** Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences.
- Optional student resource: Youth Update: Youth Update. *When Divorce Divides: How Can You Cope?* Available on line at www.americancatholic.org.

Notes to Teacher

The discussion of divorce/annulment and separation with students can be very challenging given that in any classroom, a number of students are experiencing family breakdown. The following precautions should be followed to prevent distress in students and encourage those who are already experiencing the disruption and pain of family breakdown.

- It is highly recommended that teachers read the teacher resource: *Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences* (in appendix 8.6) prior to teaching this lesson. It contains up-to-date information regarding the consequences of divorce for children and will assist teaching in addressing any issues students may bring forward.
- It is important to note that although the research outlines a number of possible emotional/social/academic/behaviour problems for children of divorcing parents, only a small number of children actually suffer significant pathology. Most children adjust over time to the changes inherent in separation and divorce.

- Although we want students to recognize the negative impact of family breakdown, it is important to keep this lesson focused on finding ways to remain hopeful and supportive. Acknowledging the pain while focusing on ways to remain strong hope-filled persons honours what students are experiencing in their lives and offers them a way to grow through this experience on their way to becoming happy and wholesome Christian adults.
- The teacher resources provided that outline the negative effects of divorce is not meant for students, nor should its content be used as additional information for students. The negative affects of such in-depth information could be extremely harmful to children of this age. It is the role of the teacher to weigh how much information is necessary in order to respond to student questions and concerns while ensuring that the information is couched in a language of hope.
- Some children, whose parents divorce, are concerned that their parents are ‘bad people’. They believe that in the eyes of the church, Marriage is forever and divorce is a sin. They are concerned that God will punish their parents for the sin of divorce. It is important to ensure students of the following:
 - God wants all people to be happy. The institution of marriage is an out-flowing of God’s all encompassing love. It is in the family that we first come to know what it means to be loved and to love another. A divorce complicates and fragments the love within a nuclear family.
 - The Catholic community of faith requires and supports married couples to be faithful to each other and to love each other forever. When a married relationship is marked by fidelity and lasts forever, family joy, love and peace can come to a rich fulfillment. The Christian image of marriage as a life-long union of a man and woman, living in fidelity and love, always open to the possibility of children is God’s wish for human perfection. It is the ideal that God holds out to us and which we as Christians strive to achieve.
 - Sometimes people make serious mistakes and these mistakes hurt others. In our human frailty we are not always able to live up to the ideal that God has given to us.
 - When a family is going through the process of a separation or divorce, new relationships are being formed. Anger and fighting often can occur, one parent usually leaves the home, and sometime siblings are separated as one may go with one parent and another with the other parent. Moving forward will often require reconciliation among and between the family members.
 - Like Jesus, all persons are called to be forgiving and compassionate. The capacity to forgive and the desire to be forgiven is at the heart of what it means to be human. Even though the fact of separation will not change, over time all members of the family can grow to forgive each other for the disruption, pain and sorrow caused by the divorce. With God’s help, they can learn to love and care for each other in a new way that reflects their changed reality.

- Although our Church recognizes that divorce is not good, divorce itself is not a sin. Our church recognizes that some marriage relationships are so destructive that a divorce is necessary for the health and well-being of the family members. The human brokenness that makes separation and divorce necessary is real, and must be addressed.

Catholic Graduate Expectations

An effective communicator who :

- (a) listens actively and creatively to understand and learn in light of Gospel values
- (c) presents information and ideas clearly and honestly and with sensitivity to others

A reflective, creative and holistic thinker who :

- (a) recognizes there is more grace in our world than sin and that hope is essential to facing all challenges

As self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner who :

- (a) demonstrates a confident and positive sense of self and respect for the dignity and welfare of others.
- (g) Examines and reflects on one's personal values, abilities and aspirations influencing life's choices and opportunities

A caring family member who;

- (a) Relates to family members in a loving, compassionate and respectful manner.

Learning Expectation

Students will be able to:

- demonstrate a knowledge of the impact on the family of family break-down (divorce/annulment/separation) and identify ways in which the family can remain the primary source of wellbeing, spiritual renewal, emotional security and love for its members.

Assessment Opportunities:

Personal Communication: Journal reflection used to assess the students' ability to identify their personal strengths and those family members they can rely on for support in the face of family breakdown.

Research: Assess adequacy and thoroughness of data collected – formative.

Unit culminating activity: Assess using teacher created rubric or checklist.

TEACHING / LEARNING STRATEGIES

- 1) **Teacher Presentation:** Tell students that today's lesson is about the experience of family breakdown (separation, divorce and annulment). They will be exploring this topic from the perspective of the children in the family and looking at ways to work together as a strong family unit to work through the challenges that family breakdown can present. Assure them that it is possible for members of families experiencing separation/divorce/annulment to successfully resolve the changes to their lives that may be brought on by separation/divorce/annulment.

- 2) **Think/Pair/Share:** Provide students with a copy of **BLM 3** *Dear Abby*.
 - a. Independently, students read the letter and respond in writing to the response questions.
 - b. In pairs, students discuss their responses and make changes based on new insights from their partner.
 - c. As a whole group, students share their responses to the questions.
 - d. After, debrief the students using the following points:
 - i. Affirm for students that a family can still be a place of love and security even in the face of these challenges. The love that each person has for the other members of the family can be a source of comfort and hope as parents and children work toward adjusting their lives to their new reality.
 - ii. In John 15:5, Jesus tells us that God our creator has made us to grow and mature. We are created to be persons of hope and compassion, to reach out to others rather than focusing only on our own needs.
 - iii. In a previous lesson you may remember what was found by the research done by the Vanier Institute for the Family. Their research found that members of strong families are able to view stress or crises as an opportunity to grow.
 - iv. When family members reach out to each other rather than focusing on their own needs, the family home becomes a place of security and hope. Family members can work through the many challenges that life places in their path and grow in their understanding and compassion for others because of it.
 - v. We become better persons when we face challenges with hope and confidence in our ability to work our way through it.

- 3) **Question Box:** Place a question box at the front of the room. Distribute sheets of paper and invite students to write any questions they have about divorce/annulment/separation on the sheet. Tell students that all questions are anonymous (do not sign the sheet) and you will do your best to answer all questions. Assure them that no question is foolish. Give students ample time to reflect and write. Sheets are then folded and placed in the question box. Students are given the journal reflection below to work on while the teacher goes through

the questions preparing appropriate responses before responding to the students. When students have completed their journal entry and the teacher is prepared to respond, read off each question and then provide an appropriate response.

Teacher Note regarding Question Box : You may need time to reflect on and formulate an appropriate answer for some questions. Tell students that you will respond to them tomorrow when you have had time to think about them in depth. Challenging questions may require you to utilize the wisdom of colleagues, social worker, or other appropriate adults. If questions are inappropriate, do not read them but tell students that some questions were inappropriate for classroom discussion but you will be glad to meet with students individually to discuss the question with them.

- 4) **Journal Reflection:** *This journal can serve as a discussion platform between parents and students if given as a homework assignment.*
 - a. Respond to the following question either by writing your response in your journals or recording them on a tape recorder. If done after a discussion with your parents/guardians, their comments can be included.
 - b. “If your family was to face a challenge, (e.g divorce, a loss of income, serious illness, alcoholism, abuse of parent or child, death of a family member, moving across the country or out-of-country), what strengths does your family possess that would help you remain hopeful and determined? Who could you turn to for support? Why would you choose this person? Why might someone in the family turn to you for support?”

- 5) **Research:** Using resources from diocesan offices, telephone directories, computers, flyers and library resources, students identify organizations in the community that support families in times of family breakdown.
 - a. Tell them that this information will be an important part of the upcoming culminating activity.
 - b. If possible, invite someone from the program *Rainbows For All God’s Children* to do a mini presentation as an introduction to this research project.

- 6) **Culminating Activity :** Distribute and review the instructions for the culminating activity found on Blackline Master 8.4. You may choose to have students work independently or in groups. If students are working independently, have them complete only 2 of the 6 possible categories. If this is a group project, form groups of three, and have them complete the project as outlined in **BLM 4**.

BLM 3**DEAR ABBY**

My mom and dad are divorcing and it is messing up my whole life. Dad has moved out but he still turns up at the house most nights and he and mom get into these big fights. Usually the fights are about money and who will get the house. One night I heard them arguing about who was going to get custody of my brother and me. I don't understand how they can even think about that. What about how I feel? Today my dad came home with a truck and took most of our furniture for his place and our house looks so empty. Doesn't he care about us any more?

Mom cries a lot and gets angry when we ask her for anything, or when we forget to hang up our coat or put our dishes in the dishwasher. Whenever I ask for money for school or to go out with our friends, she gives me a big lecture on not having any money anymore and says I will have to get a paper route to help out around the house. I don't think I can stand it any more. It never us to be like this.

The worst part is that no one asks me how I feel about all of this. You would think my mom and dad would ask me how I am doing. This really hurts! I hate going to school and I don't want to see my friends because I don't want them to know what is going on. Yesterday, my best friend and I got into a fight over nothing - I am just so angry all the time. And today, the teacher got all up in my face because I didn't have my work done "for the third day in a row." Then she sent me to the principal's office and he threatened to call home if my work didn't improve. I never told him why I can't seem to work. I just told him I'd try harder, but I probably won't. I really don't care if they fail me, but I hope they don't call my mom. I just wish they would get off my back for a while. I just wish I had someone to talk to, but I don't.

Will I feel like this forever? What did I do to deserve this? How can I make it all go away?

Daniel

Complete the following on a separate sheet of paper:

1. List the problems Daniel is experiencing because of his parent's divorce.
2. Answer the following questions:
 - a. What are some other challenges young people might face because of family breakdown?
 - b. What might they be worried about?
 - c. What questions might they have?
 - d. What role might forgiveness have in the healing process for Daniel?
 - e. What signs might a friend see that would help them determine that Daniel is upset about something?
 - f. If you were Daniel's friend, how might you 'be there' for him?

BLM 4

Culminating Activity: Youth Guidelines

Many families today experience the challenges of family breakdown (separation, divorce, annulment); your family may be one or you may know a family that has been through it. Using your own personal life experience, the results of your previous research, and what you have learned through the presentations in this unit, create guidelines to help others your age meet these challenges in a constructive, loving and life-giving way.

If you are to complete this guideline independently, select two (2) of the following categories to include in your guideline.

If you are working in a group to complete this activity, divide the categories among you evenly, complete your section independently, then work as a group to unite your information into a final guideline.

Your guidelines can be in the form of a booklet, flyer, song lyrics, or poster.

Each selected category should contain at least 4 items (e.g. 4 signs that a peer may be going through a family breakdown.)

1. A list of the possible challenges youth might face
2. Signs that a peer may be going through a family breakdown
3. Ways in which the family members can support each other
4. Suggestions about how peers can support each other
5. A list of persons and organizations that could be of help
6. A prayer for young people to say when their family is experiencing difficult times

APPENDIX 3**Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions About Family Breakdown**

Q. What is the difference between a divorce and an annulment?

A. Divorce is defined as the dissolution of the marriage bond. That is, the marriage is considered to be valid but the act of divorce ends the marriage. The Church adheres strictly to Jesus' words in the Gospel: "What God has joined let no man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). Thus we believe that no human power can dissolve or break the bond of a truly Sacramental marriage. However, the Church also acknowledges that in some cases, such as in an abusive relationship, divorce is necessary to protect the well-being of the abused family members – spouse or children.

However, after a civil divorce is procured a marriage can be declared null and void from the beginning. This official process in the Church is called an annulment. In the simplest terms an annulment simply states that, because of any number of problems *at the time of marriage*, a valid *sacramental* marriage never occurred and thus the individuals are free to marry again.

Q. Are there any circumstances under which divorce can be permitted?

A. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, "If civil divorce remains the only way of ensuring certain legal rights, the care of the children, or the protection of inheritance, it can be tolerated and does not constitute a moral offence. (#2383).

Q. If a couple are married in the Catholic Church, have a child, and have that child baptized; would that child be considered illegitimate if the couple later divorced and had their marriage annulled?

A. No. Illegitimacy isn't a "Church" word or a religious belief; it's a legal matter. Catholic marriage and annulments aren't about legalities in civil society. The Catholic Marriage is a Sacrament and its laws are those of morality. In fact, the laws of the Church are better understood as a way of life – how Christians should live their lives if they love God and want him in their life. The baby will face some challenges, since its parents are separated, but illegitimacy isn't one of them!

Q. What does the Catholic Church say about marriage and divorce?

A. Marriage between a man and a woman can be a great good if it is rooted in love; divorce, however necessary it may be at the time, brings sorrow to all those it touches.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that matrimony (the sacrament of marriage) is for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. It's more

than a human contract. It's designed by God and is a very special, highly blessed part of the divine plan.

The Catholic Church believes that marriage is forever. You may have noticed that this view isn't widely held--although I think few people get married thinking that they only mean to stay married for a month or two!

The Church acknowledges a lot of reasons why people may have gotten married in error, why their marriages weren't "real." It allows partners in such marriages to separate. This isn't actually divorce; it means that, in the Church's eyes, their marriage was not a sacramental marriage from the beginning and therefore the sacrament of marriage never occurred in the first place.

The Church can see that divorce (as a civil law) is necessary sometimes. The Church isn't "happy" about it, but sees that it's the best thing legally and for the continuation of life in the world for both partners. It's remarriage that causes most of the tangles with Church law. But that's another question for another day!

adapted from: Q&A section of American Catholic Website. www.americancatholic.org

Q. I am angry with God for not helping my family stay together. When they were fighting, I prayed that God would help them love each other again. Will I be punished for feeling this anger toward God?

A. God understands how you are feeling and would much rather that you get angry and keep talking to him rather than reject him. Think about when you are angry with a friend. If you say what you are feeling, it helps you to work through your anger. Just remember, however, that a conversation with God is like a conversation with your friend. You must also be willing to sit and listen to what God is telling you. It is hard to hear at first when you are angry, but if you really pray – and really listen – God will speak to you in the silence of your heart. Remember, God loves you and your family more than you can ever imagine.

Q. Everyone tells me I should be sympathetic to my friends when their parents are divorcing but sometime they use their parents' divorce as an excuse to take advantage of their parents, teachers and friends. If one parent will not give them what they want, they get the other parent to give it to them. If they do not want to do their work in school, they tell the teacher they are too upset about the divorce to work. Then they tell their friends they really put one over on their parents or the teacher. They use this same excuse to be rude with friends or to get into a fight with students they don't like. They leave home and go live with the other parent whenever they don't get their way. They seem to have a lot more freedom, not a lot more pain! Do you really think I should be sympathetic toward them?

A. It's true that some kids will manipulate both parents to their seeming advantage. This is characteristic of the pattern of visitation. I know it's asking a lot of you to be

sympathetic toward what looks like a lot of fun, but, believe me, success in this kind of manipulation really doesn't turn out for the best. For you, I suggest avoiding resentment. Resentment doesn't help them and it certainly doesn't help you. For them, it's easy to say that they shouldn't take advantage of their parents' lack of communication. What's hard is for them to act responsibly when adults in the family are sad, angry, stressed and probably distracted in their role of guidance and authority.

Q. I never know what to say to my friends when I hear that their parents are getting a divorce. My parents are happy together and I cannot imagine what it must be like to live in a broken family. What can I do or say to help them?

A. Don't be afraid to bring up the subject when you're talking with friends. When parents split up, friends often are reluctant to dump their problems on you. Reassure your friend that you care about what's happening and ask questions such as: "Are you angry sometimes?" "What do you think is going to happen?" "How do you feel when we talk about divorce?"

**Adapted from Youth Update; *When Divorce Divides: How can you cope?*
<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/YU/ay0791.asp>**

APPENDIX 4**Church Teaching on Marriage****What is Marriage in the Catholic Tradition?**

Marriage is a loving, life-giving and faithful relationship between a man and a woman. It is a natural institution that predates all social, legal and religious systems; its existence extends back beyond the limits of human memory. Since marriage is the origin of the family, which is the basic unit of society, it is also vitally important for the future of humanity. These basic truths can be recognized through our human reason and experience.

What does the Catholic Church teach about marriage?

In the broadest sense, the heart of the Church's definition of marriage is the same as what has always existed across cultures and faiths: the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Marriage is also a sacrament, a sign of God's love for humanity and Christ's love for the Church. Every sacrament gives a grace to assist us according to the circumstances of our lives. The grace of the sacrament of marriage strengthens and supports married couples. It is not a magic wand that takes away all difficulties, but a free gift from God that perfects the love of husbands and wives for each other so that it might more and more reflect the love Christ has for his Church.

Taken from: Marriage Matters, Catholic Organization for Life and Family, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. www.colf.ca

APPENDIX 5**Divorce: Facts, Causes and Consequences**

Excerpts from: Divorce: facts, causes and consequences. Dr. Anne Marie Ambert

The following information is not meant to be shared in its entirety with students. The following points will help you to answer student questions with confidence. Do not share information from this resource with students unless in response to questions. This information is meant to enhance your knowledge base and to provide you with information as you develop your comfort and competency in compassionately engaging students in this Family Life issue.

Divorce causes poverty

Divorce is a direct cause of poverty for a large proportion of women and their children, although a sizeable proportion of divorces are themselves caused by economic hardship (Smock et al., 1997). Once separation takes place, the mother and child unit becomes even poorer in these cases (Statistics Canada, 1999). Studies carried out by Galarneau and Sturroch (1997), Finnie (1993), and Bianchi et al. (1999) all indicate that, in the first year after divorce, and adjusting for family size, women's household income plummets by about 20 to 40% while men's declines far less. Even three years after divorce, women's income remains far below what they had during marriage and far below their ex-husbands' current income.

Ex-husbands, compared to ex-wives, are less likely to be poor because their income is generally higher, they do not have full care of their children with all the attendant expenses, and their support payments are usually not crippling. Nevertheless, it should be added that in a decade when most families have two breadwinners, men lose far more economically than in the past when they divorce, especially those who are married to a high-earning wife. As support payments become better enforced, these two factors may contribute in the long run to dissuade many men from endangering their marriage.

Another way of looking at this is to consider single-mother families. In 2002, according to the Vanier Institute of the Family (2004), 35% of all female lone-parent families lived in poverty while many more hovered just one precarious step above the level. It should also be noted that the younger the children are at the time of parental divorce or common-law dissolution, the more likely they are to be poor. This is because they have younger parents who earn less. On average, single parents who are poor have an income that is 40% below the poverty line. This is dire poverty.

Canada and the U.S. are the two western countries in which single-parent families experience extremely elevated poverty rates, and where there is a vast difference between the incomes of single- and two-parent families.

Increased risk of problems for children of divorced parents

In a nutshell, **although most children do not experience developmental problems**, divorce is certainly a strong risk factor (Cherlin, 1999) and a source of stressors (Emery, 1999). Divorce is, above all, an emotionally painful transition and, as Kelly and Emery (2003:359) point out, it can "create lingering feelings of sadness, longing, worry, and regret that coexist with competent psychological and social functioning." Connidis (2003) remarks that relationships are changed after divorce and have to be renegotiated many times over the years, and the effects are felt across several living generations within a family.

Although average differences are not huge, children whose parents are divorced (and even after they are remarried or repartnered) are *more likely* than children whose parents remain together to (e.g., Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001; Le Blanc et al., 1995; Sun and Li, 2002):

- suffer from depression, anxiety, and other emotional disorders;
- exhibit behavioural problems including hyperactivity, aggressiveness, fighting, and hostility;
- become young offenders;
- do less well in school and stay less long in school;
- have more relationship problems, in part due to their behavioural problems.

Finally, when they are older, adults whose parents divorced during their childhood and teen years, compared to adults from intact two-parent families, tend to:

- have had a child out of wedlock more often, particularly during adolescence;
- have achieved lower educational levels;
- be more often unemployed and do less well economically;
- have more marital problems and divorce more.
- adults are more likely to have lost contact with their father (Amato, 2003) and to report a less happy childhood when their parents separated (Williams, 2001). As well, a study by Boyd and Norris (1995) has found that older children of divorced parents leave home earlier than others. They leave home in even greater numbers when their custodial parents remarry and even more so when both parents remarry. (We have no information about cohabitation; however, the results are probably similar.) A consequence of this earlier home leaving is that for many it becomes too expensive to continue their education. This, in turn, contributes to lower occupational skills and higher unemployment. Frederick and Boyd (1998) have shown, on the basis of Statistics Canada data, that 80 to 84% of men and women aged 20-44 who lived with their two parents when they were 15 years old completed high school. This compares with figures ranging from 65 to 73% for those whose parents had divorced, including those whose parents had remarried.

There are, however, several cautions that are advised in interpreting the above information.

The first is that, among an unknown number of children, *some* of what appear to be negative effects of divorce already existed before parental separation. That is to say, many children and adolescents who are difficult after divorce were also difficult before, either because of their personalities, peer pressure, problems with parents, or interparental conflict and lack of parenting investment. Therefore, when studying children after divorce, it is important to know how they were before the divorce. Even so, researchers who utilize a longitudinal methodology have found that, even when these past characteristics are taken into account, there still were effects specifically attributable to divorce. Some of these effects have been shown to persist beyond the childhood years (Cherlin, et al, 1998).

The second important point is that whatever statistics you read concerning the negative outcomes of children "of divorce," they do *not* apply to the *majority* of these children. What these statistics indicate is that children of divorced parents have a greater *risk* of developing problems than children whose parents remain together (Cherlin, 1999). As Pedro-Carroll (2001) points out, *one has to differentiate between distress and disorder*. Most children of divorce experience a certain level of distress, which often lasts for over a decade, but most still function well, that is, do not experience "disorders" (Laumann-Billings and Emory, 2000). Nevertheless, I do not wish to err in the opposite direction and shrug off the negative effects of divorce. *They are real and costly* for children, parents, and schools, as well as the welfare and health care systems (for a review, see Ambert, 2005).

Furthermore, as the concept of distress implies, at the time of their parents' separation, children generally suffer a great deal: most do not want them to divorce; they miss the other parent; when little, they may feel that they are partly to blame for the divorce; some desperately try to get their parents together again; they are sad; some cry a lot while others lash out and develop temporary behavioural problems.

There are six main explanations for children's negative outcomes following a parental divorce.

1. As we have seen, **poverty**, or even a **significant reduction in financial resources**, so often follows divorce, and is a root cause of children's problems. In fact, the "typical" negative outcomes of children of divorce much resemble those of children in poverty (for a review, see Ambert, 2005; Bouchard et al., 1991; Ross, et al., 1995).

In the case of divorce, when children are poor or become poor, they experience a great many stressors in their lives. This is because divorce is not a single event but a series of transitions. To begin with, at least 55% of Canadian women and their children move after separation (Dandurand, 1994); they often have to move into more crowded and dilapidated housing, where there is more noise and pollution. They may be less healthy as a result and more stressed. The neighbourhood may be less safe, have more children who are equally poor, and who do less well in school, and engage more in delinquency.

Moreover, the custodial parent, generally the mother, has difficulty making ends meet and may work long hours. When she returns home, she may be tired and generally has less time to devote to her children. As a result, children of divorced mothers who are poor or who are financially insecure (near poor) may receive less attention, guidance, supervision, encouragement, and affection than other children. These mothers may not be able, for a variety of reasons, to monitor their child's school progress or lack thereof. When the children are out of school, they may be home alone or with peers, all unsupervised, or on the streets so to speak. Unsupervised children are far more likely than others to engage in delinquent acts and premature sex. Thus, if we were to eliminate or even significantly reduce child poverty, the consequences of divorce on children would be far less negative.

2. The above paragraph has already hinted at the second cause of children's problems after divorce: **diminished parenting**. Divorce creates a series of stressors for parents, particularly for the custodial parents. In turn, as we have seen, these stressors diminish parenting time, skills, expressed affection, and increase parenting instability, harshness, or yet permissiveness. After divorce, many parents experience a dramatic downfall in their ability to care for their children, to provide them with a regular routine, to shelter them from stressors and dangers. Faced with their own problems, many divorced parents too often become their children's pals and abdicate their parental responsibilities. These adolescents then lack guidance and authoritative parenting. Amato and Gilbreth (1999) suggest that children of divorce have better outcomes when *non-residential fathers* are more than "Sunday daddies" and *behave as parents*—that is, when they provide emotional and practical support, make behavioural demands, place limits on what can be done, and administer consistent discipline.

3. Many divorced parents, both as a result of divorce and poverty, are so **burdened emotionally** that they become, at least temporarily, depressed while others initiate a desperate search for a new mate that makes them far less available to their children and responsive to their needs. All of these factors bring instability and insecurity to the home life and thereby burden children emotionally.

Carlson and Corcoran (2001) have found that a decent family income, mothers' sound psychological functioning, and a good home environment, including adequate parenting, reduce or eliminate the potentially negative effects of family structure.

4. Parents who continue quarrelling and verbally abusing each other in front of their children *after* divorce cause immense distress to their offspring. **Continued parental conflict**—especially when the children are caught in the middle—may result in depression, hostility, aggressiveness, and other acting-out activities on the part of children. Moreover, parental conflict presents a dysfunctional role model. Children learn that disagreements can be solved only by fighting. This

lesson may carry further negative consequences down the road in their own relationships.

However, divorces that end severe interparental conflict have positive consequences for children; in contrast, low-conflict marriages that end in divorce have a strong negative effect on children, perhaps because, from the children's point of view, they are so unexpected and unwelcome (Booth and Amato, 2001).

5. Some of the causes of divorce are actually in part causes of the troubled home in which the children lived during their parents' marriage. This would apply mainly to those couples which were conflictual and were ineffective parents because of their troubled relationship. Thus, as we have seen earlier, these children had **pre-existing problems** which divorce may further exacerbate (Cherlin et al., 1998).
6. A last cause is one that is rarely mentioned and it has to do with genetics (Rutter, 2002). A proportion of people who divorce do so because they are difficult, conflictual, or problematic individuals who pass on these predispositions to their children via **genetic inheritance**. These children are already predisposed to being difficult by temperament, have a home environment which fosters these difficulties, and the divorce situation generally exacerbates their condition.

Are there differences by age and sex to children's adjustment to divorce?

Yes. Girls adapt generally better to divorce although not necessarily to the remarriage of a custodial mother. There is, however, a wide diversity of adaptation levels depending on the child's personality and the family circumstances. The same applies in terms of age. On the one hand, very small children, younger than 4, may not note the absence of a parent they had rarely seen; if the mother who has always been their primary caretaker functions well, they will not be significantly affected. They will also more than likely adapt well to a parental remarriage. On the other hand, children between 4 and 10 may be the most negatively affected because they are not yet mature enough to understand their loss and their changing family circumstances (Jenkins and Smith, 1993). They may even blame themselves for the divorce.

Moreover, when poverty is present, these young children are likely to be even more affected than adolescents, particularly in terms of their intellectual development. New research clearly indicates that poverty during the early childhood years hinders cognitive and verbal development (Pagani, et al., 1997). It delays small children's adaptation into kindergarten. Many of these children arrive in Grade 1 unprepared to learn and a cycle of educational failure begins. In contrast, a child who becomes poor only during adolescence may already have a solid foundation on which to build success in the educational system.

Even so, older children can also be significantly affected by the six main causes of negative outcomes discussed earlier. For adolescents, a particularly difficult situation arises when the custodial parent loses the opportunity to communicate with and supervise them. Adolescence is already an age when "temptations" towards deviance abound and a

youth who is bereft of parental support may succumb to detrimental peer pressures. School work may suffer accordingly. Adolescent girls whose parents have separated, are at higher risk than others of becoming sexually active and pregnant (Wu, 1996). This risk is further elevated when their custodial mother is openly active sexually.

Does parental remarriage help children?

There is not a large body of research on this question in Canada. In the U.S., studies are finding that, while a custodial mother's remarriage helps the family financially, and may be very good for the mother, results are more mixed for children (Morrison and Ritualo, 2000). Often remarriage results in additional negative consequences for children, particularly girls who had a close relationship with their mother. These girls may resent the intruder. In my research, some women students have written that they had purposely destroyed their mother's remarriage by becoming horrendous and behaving very badly toward the new husband. For their part, boys are able to escape as they tend, in adolescence, to spend less time at home—which may in itself lead to delinquency. Still on the negative side, girls are more likely to be sexually abused by their stepfathers or mothers' boyfriends than by their own fathers (Giles-Sims, 1997).

We have already mentioned that older adolescents and young adults tend to leave home earlier once their custodial parent remarries. This may be a result of conflict with the new stepparent, or because the new couple does not make them feel welcome, or because they are subtly or not so subtly "encouraged" to leave.

On the positive side, younger children usually adapt better, especially when they have always known the stepparent. Many children do enjoy or benefit from the presence and affection of a stepparent. Many boys are advantaged by the addition of an authoritative adult male role model in the family (Hetherington, 1993). Children may also benefit from an extension of their kinship network with the addition of step grandparents and stepsiblings. Studies of young adults whose custodial parent's *remarriage had endured* have found that they were strongly attached to their reconstructed family and benefited emotionally from it. It is thus possible that some of the positive effects of a parent's good remarriage do not appear until later on in adulthood.

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