

Pilot Study of Three Psycho-Educational Blended Family Therapy Workshops

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There are more and more blended families in the U.S. and Canada and the majority of these family units are likely to dissolve (The Stepfamily Foundation, 2020). Children in blended families are at particular risk for behavioural and mental health concerns in comparison to their peers in other types of family units, such as nuclear or single parent families (Cadolle, 2006).

There is limited research on helping blended families (Portrie & Hill, 2005). Mental illness prevention programs addressing meaning and attachment can promote mental health and resilience in families (Armstrong, 2016). Meaning-making plays a significant role in family coping and diminishment of suffering (Walsh, 2009) and involves a sense of hope for the future; openness to feelings and connection with others; strong self-esteem; and a sense of responsibility (Armstrong, 2016a). Addressing meaning, including building better relationships, promotes mental health in families (Armstrong, 2016b).

The goal of the present research is to build skills for resilience addressing these behavioural and mental health concerns in blended families through psycho-educational workshops. These workshops are being developed inspired by three family therapy theories and involve stakeholders' (blended families, agency heads, mental health experts) opinions in their development (Armstrong, 2017). Psycho-educational workshops can support blended families in managing common challenges (Chen & George, 2005).

Three family therapy models that address meaning will be adapted to create workshops that include practical tools for blended families. Theoretical foundations of these workshops are grounded in:

- a- Satir's Family Therapy model (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991), a well-recognized pioneering holistic model focused on self-esteem and dialogue;
- b- Emotionally-Focused Family Therapy (Johnson & Lee, 1999), a more recently established model developed to build secure connections with others; and,
- c- R.E.A.L. Therapy – Rational Emotive Attachment Logotherapy for Families (Armstrong, 2016b), a new holistic family therapy model based on meaning and attachment.

As well, research (Ganong & Coleman, 2017; Kumar, 2017; Papernow, 2018; Visher & Visher, 1996) has shown that blended families seem to have these specific challenges:

- 1- Maintaining a solid couple bond and parent coalition;
- 2- Struggles with losses, loyalties and change;
- 3- Dividing parenting/stepparenting tasks;
- 4- Building a new family culture and addressing stigma;
- 5- Acknowledging other parents as part of the family.

This pilot study will propose one of three workshops to blended families over two one-day sessions to find out which workshop best suits their specific needs.

