

Banana Splits Program

Submitted by Andrea Messinger

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Changes in the family structure are the most common childhood trauma. Currently, it is estimated that 60% of all first marriages end in divorce. The school-based Banana Splits Program helps children redirect energy being utilized for emotional survival to the educational learning process.

Through the peer support of children who share feelings about loss and change, the Banana Splits Program helps each child regain a feeling of stability. They confront the crisis of death, divorce, illness or remarriage, and by doing so, learn to live with it.

Banana Splits groups meet weekly or bi-monthly during the children's lunch periods. The groups are open to children in grades 2 - 5. Groups are led by the School Social Worker, Mrs. Andrea Messinger, LCSW.

Forming a group is easy. It takes no more than a few children in each class who find friends and pass the word: "Banana Splits is a group for any child whose family has changed."

Each child participates as he/she feels comfortable. The group allows each child to grow at his/her own pace.

For further information about the program, please call **Mrs. Messinger at 203-3600 ext. 5355.**

You may be concerned about how your separation or divorce will affect your children. They are likely to feel unsure about what their life will look like after their parents split up. More than anything else, children want to feel protected and loved. The uncertainty of life after divorce often causes them to worry. Creating some regular routines in the day and consistently communicating what to expect will provide comfort to your kids.

Discussion about divorce should be tailored to a child's age, maturity, and temperament. However, one basic message needs to be conveyed: What happened is between mom and dad and does not have anything to do with the kids. Most children will feel they are to blame even after parents have said

they are not. It's vital for parents to keep providing this reassurance. (Kids Health "Helping Your Child Through a Divorce")

Children need people to talk to other than their parents. Some kids may avoid telling their parents their true feelings because they feel guilty adding to their problems. They may more freely express themselves with someone outside the situation, whether it be a friend, teacher, relative or counselor.

What I need from my mom and dad – a child's list of wants (From "Helping Children Understand Divorce" University of Missouri)

- I need both of you to stay involved in my life. Please write letters, make phone calls, and ask me lots of questions. When you don't stay involved, I feel like I'm not important and that you don't really love me.
- Please stop fighting and work hard to get along with each other. Try to agree on matters related to me. When you fight about me, I think that I did something wrong and I feel guilty.
- I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I spend with each of you. Please support me and the time that I spend with each of you. If you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to take sides and love one parent more than the other.
- Please communicate directly with my other parent so that I don't have to send messages back and forth.
- When talking about my other parent, please say only nice things, or don't say anything at all. When you say mean, unkind things about my other parent, I feel like you are expecting me to take your side.
- Please remember that I want both of you to be a part of my life. I count on my mom and dad to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.

For more detailed parental tips on how to help your child cope with the effects of divorce, click the following link:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children_divorce.htm