

What are the best methods to support separated families to communicate together in an early year setting?

Literature review

This study will be researching the importance of communication between divorced/ separated parents, for the best holistic outcome for the child. (government, digital service, 2011) states that a divorce is a legal process of dissolving a marriage. It formally ends the marital relationship between two people, addressing various legal issues such as division of assets, and debts, child custody and support, alimony, and sometimes other matters like visitation rights and name changes. A court or legal authority oversees the process to ensure fairness. Divorce can impact young children leaving them exposed to parental conflict, which can have a major setback for children's development. Communication can sometimes be difficult for parents during this separation but is also essential when having young children, (Cambridge university, 2023) states that communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, or feelings between individuals or groups. It involves sending, receiving, and interpreting messages through various mediums such as spoken or written language, gestures, body language, visual cues, or digital signals. Effective communication requires both the sender and receiver to understand and interpret the message correctly. It is essential in personal relationships, workplaces, and broader society for collaboration and connection. During such a difficult transition it could be beneficial for the child to have a trusted adult to guide them through this unfortunate event. (Welsh government, 2022) agrees that children need an enabling adult someone who is

supportive, nurturing, and a responsible figure in a child's life this could vary from parents, a teacher, or another trusted figure who fosters a positive, growth-oriented environment. The role of an enabling adult is critical for the emotional, social, and intellectual development of young individuals, particularly in difficult or transitional phases of life such as divorce. Many practitioners find themselves being the messenger during this phase of the child's life, this is why it is important for the practitioner to observe the child and keep good communication with both parents. (parenting in Wales: Guidance on engagement and support, 2017) agrees that communication with parents in an early year's setting is crucial for several reasons such as, it supports the child's development, parents provide valuable insights into their child's needs, preferences, and behaviours, helping educators tailor learning experiences that support the child's development. While allowing consistency between home and school. This continuity helps reinforce routines, values and learning techniques, giving the child a sense of security and stability. It can also strengthen relationships, regular communication builds a positive, trusting relationship between educators and parents, which is essential for addressing any concerns about the child's emotional, social or cognitive development. Open communication also enables early identification of developmental or behaviour issues. By working together, parents and educators can implement strategies to support the child as early as possible. When parents are well informed and engaged in their child's learning, they are more likely to contribute to their education and well-being, creating a supportive environment both at home and in nursery. Clear communication reassures parents that their child is in a safe,

nurturing environment, making them more comfortable and confident in the care provided. (Levkovich and Eyal, 2020) suggest that during their research they gathered that, children as young as 5 years old have a very vague understanding of divorce which can sometimes lead to children being afraid of abandonment and self-blame. Leaving practitioners in the middle of parents trying to navigate the best outcome for the child. They also state that divorce has been found to have a negative relation to academic achievement and that younger children around 0-5 years old seem to be affected academically, rather than older children. This is a concern as this is such a crucial time for children as their brain develops more than at any time in life, and early brain development has a lasting impact on a child's ability to succeed and learn in school. (Queen Margret University, 2023) agrees stating that early childhood is arguable the most significant time of a child's life, as it sets down the foundation for their future growth and wellbeing. During this time, they will be building strong connections within the community around them, they will need to feel a sense of a belonging, to achieve their full potential. So, during this time they need to be protected from any emotional distress. (Olukayode Emmanuel Apata et al., 2023) research study also agrees that divorce has several effects on young children, causing emotional distress, young children may experience feelings of sadness, confusion, anger and fear. They may not fully understand why their parents are separating and might feel worried about changes in their home life. Divorce can also create uncertainty for children, leading to anxiety or struggle with social relationships in nursery which can cause behavioural issues, also causing effects on their academic

development. In analysis both research methods are showing the same outcome, that divorce can be difficult for children, and cause distress, but neither of these research methods gave examples on how the community supported the child during this. (Child's mind institute, 2024)

state that one of the biggest priorities during divorce is that the children continue to thrive, and to make sure they do so they are going to need a community behind them to support them during this difficult transition, this could be practitioners, family or early years carers. A community to also support the parents to navigate co-parenting and a civilised separation, for the best interests of the child. During this time there will be many new adjustments for the child to make such as living between two houses, so allowing children to feel their emotions and support their emotions during this time is essential.

In conclusion it is proven that divorce in a child's life can be very distressing and that the only way we can support the child during this is to be a supportive enabling adult to make sure the child continues to thrive and sets a solid foundation holistically, for the future adolescence.

Methodology

This research is going to be conducted by interviewing divorced parents whose child is in an early year setting, observing the family in a content setting, to allow the researcher to get an in-depth overview of what can be improved. The researcher will also be sampling the nursery staff, to get an understanding of the child's development and well-being since the divorce. How the researcher will chose the participants will be based off, which family could benefit most out of the experience, they will need to ask

questions such as, which child is struggling most in the setting with lack of communication and separation from both parents, and which parents could benefit with a good co parent relationship? To do this the researcher will need to speak with the early year setting staff, and key workers to each individual child, and come to an agreement as to which family could benefit the most.

During the interview the researcher will discuss with only the parents how they feel the development and wellbeing of their child has been affected during the process of the divorce, for the researcher to find useful methods to support the child and parents during this difficult time. Once the researcher has conducted the interview with parents and agreed with a contract to protect the family and their confidentiality, they will be observing the child themselves in an effective environment to see if the child's development has been affected in anyway. (Levy, and Harmey, 2023) states that observation is a beneficial method, as it allows the researcher to experience real world content, and study behaviours and interactions, allowing the researcher to get a more accurate understanding. This will allow the researcher to focus on real time observations, allowing them to understand the broader social, cultural, or physical context of the phenomenon, adding depth to their analysis. (Robert-Holmes, 2018) During an observation it is key to observe the communication style between parents, is there a respectful tone, or is it hostile and dismissive. How they co parent, are they working together for the best interests of the child, no signs of competition or conflict. Observe the emotional atmosphere, is it a healthy environment for the child or does the child feel uncomfortable in the

atmosphere, and is unable to thrive emotionally in this environment, supported by (Brown, Perkins, and Helen 2019.) During the interview and observation, the researcher will be using a form of technology such as a Go-pro to video the experience this will allow the researcher to revisit this experience and make sure they have perceived the interaction in a different sense and that they have captured the correct amount of research to continue their study. (Robson, 2011) suggests that using a video footage during research can carry several benefits, such as capturing nonverbal cues, as well as verbal responses, facial expressions, which can be beneficial to the researcher to return to. This will also allow the researcher to have improved accuracy, video recording will reduce reliance on memory or written notes, allowing researcher to revisit the exact moment of interest for a detailed analysis. A video record of the research process also enhances transparency and enables other researchers to observe and replicate the study method and correct the original researcher if they have perceived the interaction wrongfully or bias, which improves accuracy. (Formall and Hall, 2013) states that unstructured observation on a child after divorce has many benefits, especially when it comes to understanding the child's emotional, behavioural, and social wellbeing. Observation can provide unique insights that may not be revealed through direct questioning or conversations. Divorce can often disrupt a child's routine, which may lead to shifts in behaviour in nursery or at home. Observing the child's habits, such as sleep patterns, eating habits or all-round personality, can help identify signs of stress, upset or anxiety, which allows us to catch these big feelings early on to help support the child in need. In summary, observing a

child after divorce provides a nuanced and holistic view of their emotional, behavioural and social wellbeing. It helps identify coping mechanisms, detect issues early, and tailor interventions that can promote better adjustment and overall development. During observation in an early years setting it is important to also consider limitations, the child may act out of character if they know they are under observation, or they may even refuse to take part at all, this is why it is important to observe in an environment they feel comfortable in, and an activity they are interested in are willing to engage in, and most time keep them in an environment they are comfortable in alongside their peers, by doing this it can help you get a more accurate observation, this also applies when interviewing parents, the parents could feel embarrassed and ashamed to admit somethings, and could sway some questions, or even become untruthful. When considering how to conduct the research, interview seemed to be the best research method, as a questionnaire would not allow the researcher to get a through analysis on the family situation. (McNeill and Chapman, 2005) agree that an interview allows the researcher to gather more in-depth information. Participants can elaborate on their thoughts and feelings, providing a richer, more detailed response than what is typically possible with a questionnaire, which often has limited space for open ended answers. An interview also allows the researcher clarification if participants seem confused or interpret them differently than intended. This flexibility helps ensure that respondents fully understand the questions, leading to a more accurate analysis. While also considering adaptability, interviews allow the researcher to adapt their questions based on their participants responses. If a participant mentions

something interesting, the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to explore the topic further, which isn't possible in a structured questionnaire. While this research is on a difficult subject it is also right that the interviews can foster a more engaging, personal interaction. This rapport can encourage participants to be more open and honest in their responses, leading to higher quality data. While an interview is the chosen research method, it does have limitations (Kohler, Smith and Bahkoo, 2022) states that while interviews are valuable for in depth data collection than can also become time consuming, conducting, transcribing, and analysing interviews takes significantly more time compared to other methods like questionnaires. This makes it challenging to interview large numbers of participants, limiting the sample size. Interviews also require significant resources, such as trained interviewers, recording equipment, and time for analysis, making them more costly than other methods. (Pitts, 2023) also adds risking interview bias, the presence and behaviour of the interviewer can influence responses. Leading questions, non-verbal cues, or the interviewers' personal views may subtly shape how participants respond, introducing bias. Interviews often involve personal or sensitive topics raising concerns about maintaining confidentiality and managing emotional distress. Ensuring ethical handling of participants' information can be a challenge. Social desirability bias is also a limitation, participants may provide answers they believe are socially acceptable or aligned with what they think the interviewer wants to hear, rather than being completely honest. While interviews provide valuable qualitative insights, these limitations require careful consideration in planning, conducting, and

interpreting the research. (Sedgwick and Greenwood, 2015) states that during this research project it is important to consider the Hawthorne/ halo effect, the hawthorn effect occurs when individuals alter their behaviour because they know they are being observed or studied. This change is typically an improvement in performance or engagement, not necessarily due to any specific intervention, but simply due to the awareness of being observed. This could occur during the interview with parents or the observation with the child, especially knowing that there are cameras in the room recording the interaction. This research method has used triangulation. (Research tube, 2021) states that triangulation is a research method used to increase the credibility and validity of study findings by combining multiple approaches to investigate a research question. It helps to mitigate bias and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject being studied. This research will be using investigator triangulation which involves using multiple researchers or observers in the study to avoid individual bias. This helps ensure that the interpretation of the data is not swayed by the personal biases of a single investigator. Also, methodological triangulation will be used during this research, (Abir K Bekhet, 2012) states that methodological triangulation is using multiple methods, qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. For example, using both interviews and observation, this can offer a more rounded perspective. Although triangulation is useful, it comes with its challenges, such as being time and resource intensive, conducting triangulation requires more time, effort and resources than using a single method or source. Complexity in analysis is also a challenge, integrating data from different methods or perspectives

can be difficult, especially if they appear to conflict. In sum, triangulation enhances the reliability of research findings by incorporating diverse perspectives, methods, or data sources.

Ethical considerations

During this research study there will be very sensitive information shared with the researcher, information the families might not want anyone to know, so the researcher must consider the ethical considerations. (Roberts-Holmes, Levy, and Harmey, 2023) states that ethical considerations are key factors that researchers, professionals, and organisations must consider ensuring their actions, decisions, and research practices are morally sound and responsible. These considerations help protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of individuals and communities involved in or affected by any study or professional activity. Some common ethics are considering informed consent, participants must be fully informed about the nature, purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of a study or activity before agreeing to take part. They should voluntarily consent without coercion. Researchers or professionals must protect the privacy of participants by ensuring that personal data is kept confidential and is only shared when necessary and with appropriate safeguards. Personal information should not be disclosed without permission. Ethical research and practices should prioritise minimizing harm to participants or subjects, whether physical, psychological, emotional, or social. Participants should not be exposed to any unnecessary risks, and measures should be in place to avoid this happening or to address any harm that may occur. (Brown and Perkins, 2019) also state that researchers and professionals must be honest about the

purposes, procedures, and findings of their work. This includes avoiding deception and accurately reporting results without manipulation or falsification. Individuals have the right to make decisions about their own lives and bodies. Ethical considerations involve respecting this autonomy by allowing participants to withdraw from research at any time without penalty. Ethical decision-making involves treating all participants or stakeholder equitably and ensuring that the benefits and burdens of research or actions are distributed fairly. No group should be unfairly disadvantaged or excluded without justification. By adhering to some of these basic ethical considerations, individuals and organisations can foster trust, protect participants rights, and ensure that their actions align with moral principles and social responsibility.

During this research study it is very important that the researcher follows the ethical considerations, and to the first ethical consideration they will need to follow is gaining consent from participants, (Flewitt, 2005) states that gaining consent from participants in a research study is a crucial ethical requirement. How to effectively do this you must provide a clear explanation to participants, with clear, understandable information about the study, this includes the purpose of the study, what participation will involve (e.g., time, interview, procedures), any potential risks of discomforts, benefits of participation if there are any, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw at anytime without consequences. Once these steps have been discussed emphasize that participation is entirely voluntary. Typically, researchers provide a written informed consent form that participants must sign to indicate their agreement to participate. Allow participants adequate time to think before deciding, rather than

pressuring them into quick consent. Researchers must recognise non-consent or reluctance, such as non-verbal cues, participants might express hesitation or discomfort through body language this can be recognised by looking away, fidgeting, or avoiding engagement. These could indicate uncertainty or unwillingness, whereas some participants could directly say no, researchers must respect their decision immediately. The researcher and participant should have strong communication before starting the study, even after the consent is given, participants may decide to withdraw from the study at any point. This could through a clear statement of withdrawal or indirect signs, such as not attending scheduled sessions or becoming unresponsive. By following these guidelines, the researcher can ensure that consent is informed and voluntary, and you will be able to recognize if participants choose not to engage. During a study with information about the family's personal information, it is important that none of this information becomes visible to the public, or anyone outside of the study, there is a law in place called the data protection act 2018 (Government of UK,2018) states general data protection regulation which sets guidelines for how personal data should be processed and protected. It outlines the rights of individuals and the obligations of organisations of organisations handling personal data. The act requires personal data to be processed in a way that is, lawful, fair and transparent, data must be processed lawfully with transparency, individuals must be informed of how their data will be used. Data should be collected for specific, explicit, and legitimate purposes and not used for other purposes without consent. Data should not be kept for longer than necessary. Organisations are responsible

for ensuring compliance with these principles and must be able to demonstrate their compliance. The data protection act 2018, working in conjunction with the UK GDPR, provides a legal framework to protect personal data in the UK, ensuring that individuals have control over their data and organisations handle it responsibly. It is key that during this research study that the data of participants is to be stored in a hard drive and only the researchers can access this, the participants can have full access to this file. to protect the participants during this research project the researcher will be using fake names and a untruthful location, by doing this it helps protect the participants from any information they do not want the public to have access to. During this research project there will be many parties involved, such as the university, participants and the research, to reduce risks for both participants (NSPCC, 2023) states that the researcher must consider careful planning and ethical considerations are essential. Being by conducting a thorough risk assessment to identify potential physical, emotional, and social risks, and ensure the study design minimizes harm by only including necessary procedures. Obtaining informed consent is critical provide participants with clear, detailed information about the study, ensure their right to withdraw at any time, and take extra care with vulnerable participants. Protecting data is also important, anonymize personal information, use secure storage, and comply with data protection laws such as data protection act 2018. For physical and psychological safety, both participants and researcher should be safeguarded by providing effective equipment, monitoring emotional well-being, and ensuring a safe environment. During this study the

participants will also be children, (UNICEF, 2016) states to safeguard children in a research study involving their families, it is essential to follow ethical guidelines that prioritise their well-being, privacy, and rights. Begin by obtaining informed consent from parents or guardians, and if the child is old enough, seek their assent using age-appropriate language that makes clear they can withdraw anytime. Maintain strict privacy by using secure data storage, collecting only essential information to protect identities. Take steps to minimize emotional risks by avoiding leading or invasive questions, preparing for sensitive topics, and monitoring children's responses to ensure their comfort, with counselling support available if needed. Establish a clear child protection policy, with protocols for reporting any disclosures of abuse, and ensure all researchers are trained in safeguarding children and are aware of mandatory reporting requirements. Conduct debriefing sessions to allow participants to ask questions or share concerns and provide information on support services if needed. Lastly have the study reviewed and approved by an institutional review board, or ethics committee and conducts regular checks to ensure adherence to ethical standards, maintaining oversight throughout the study. This careful approach protects children's rights to ensure their safety at every stage of the research process.

(BERA,2024) states that researchers have responsibility to prioritise their well-being and professional development to ensure their work remains ethical, effective, and sustainable. This involves actively practicing safe care and stress management, particularly when dealing with demanding or sensitive topics, and maintaining work-life balance. Emotional preparedness is crucial, and researchers should engage in self-reflection

and seek mentorship or supervision to manage challenging emotions and prevent burnout. Continuous learning is also essential, so researchers should pursue training, attend conferences, and stay current with advancements in their field. Receiving feedback from peers and mentors supports growth and resilience, while prioritising physical safety especially during research, it helps mitigate risks. Moreover, fostering a supportive workplace culture, setting boundaries, and supporting peers contribute to a healthier learning environment. While also remembering it is their name on the paper, researcher must take full responsibility of their work so must adhere to ethics, by embracing these responsibilities, researcher can protect their own well-being while enhancing their skills and effectiveness.

(university of Wales trinity saint David, n.d.) states that the university believe that research ethic review and approval are important because it improves the quality and integrity of the research, you must consider potential impact on the university, will this study cause a bad name for university. By following the ethics and taking precautions the researcher isn't giving the public the opportunity to leave a bad review on your research study, which won't link the researcher back to the university you're studying at.

In summary it is key for every researcher to take precautions and to follow all the guidelines in place to protect the researcher, participants and the university.

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