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Healing Through Bibliotherapy

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Bibliotherapy: A Reader’s Guide

A reading regimen for adolescents coping with their parents’ divorce

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What it is & how it works

The program connects the three stages of bibliotherapy with the five stages of emotions that an adolescent feels as a result of his or her parents’ divorce. Each piece of literature will take the reader through the three stages of bibliotherapy: identification and projection, abreaction and catharsis, and insight and integration. While working through the stages of bibliotherapy, each text will also move the adolescent through the stages of emotions that he or she is likely to feel as an effect of the experience. The five stages of emotions are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The program begins with four poems written by children who have experienced their parents getting a divorce. This will allow the adolescent to connect with another child who has experienced similar emotions. There are poems to show different experiences and perspectives of divorce. It’s difficult to get adolescents to read longer novels, so starting with shorter poems can help gradually immerse them into the program. These poems will guide the child through the stages of denial and anger. The program will then switch to three fiction novels, guiding the child through the bargaining, depression and acceptance stages of emotion. Fiction novels will allow the adolescents to connect with characters experiencing similar emotions and explore in text relationships to understand their own.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Stage of Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seperation</td>
<td>Sophie</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect Life</td>
<td>Destiny Ortiz</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t You Want Me?</td>
<td>Jenny Miller</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daddy</td>
<td>Veronika J</td>
<td>Poem</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes Love Isn’t Enough</td>
<td>Lurlene McDaniel</td>
<td>Fiction novel</td>
<td>Bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still Life with Tornado</td>
<td>A.S. King</td>
<td>Fiction novel</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happyface</td>
<td>Stephen Emond</td>
<td>Fiction novel</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 stages of emotions felt by adolescents as a result of their parents' divorce:

1) Denial → this is the stage in which a child does not want to accept that his or her parents are getting a divorce. Why is this happening? It can’t happen to my family.

2) Anger → this is the stage in which a child gears his or her feelings at everyone else and might be hard to be around. The child may experience negative emotions towards one’s parents for allowing this to happen.

3) Bargaining → this is the stage in which a child will try and put off or delay the divorce.

4) Depression → this is the stage in which a child starts to realize that divorce is becoming a reality and that he or she cannot stop it or delay it from happening. Feelings will be very volatile and one may not enjoy activities that they used to because of the feelings that he or she may be experiencing.

5) Acceptance → this is the stage in which a child accepts the divorce experience. He or she will try to adjust and find ways to cope with the experience.
Why these specific texts?

These pieces of literature have specifically been chosen to be included in the reading program because they each represent the divorce experience in a different way. Every child that is involved in his or her parents’ divorce has a different experience.

**Seperation**

Published on November 11

One day, the knot in my life
The knot that once bled me dry,
I would rather all these words
Tell me why I had not failed
But that night changed my life
Like the way day turns to night
I had now grown up trying to fight
A light had been turned out like there had been a curse

Perhaps I could have done something
To stop this storm rising
Was it me? Did I just want it this way?
Was it my fault? No, but how could I ever know?
Perhaps, just perhaps, I could have changed your ways
And may not be in such a pain.

**Perfect Life**

© Destiny Ortiz

Why did it have to be me
This isn’t how it should be
My father was never there
I don’t even know if he cares
My mom was in a relationship for years
I saw her through all her tears
I saw her cry at night
She had to fight more
This was through it all
Back then when we were small
Now, she’s all grown up
It’s like she can touch the sky
To those problems she said bpa
While I had in my head, wondere what
My perfect life fell, just died
My dad chooses to do wrong things
Now just thinking about it makes me mad
Now I have another sister and brother
They make me smile like no other
They taught me how to laugh
Now I thought that was just crazy
My heart is bleeding like it was stabbed with a knife
But it’s just me wondering what happened to my perfect life.

**Don’t You Want Me?**

© Jenny Miller

Don’t want me
Don’t want me
Don’t want me
Don’t want me

Don’t you want me?

I’m your flesh and blood and daughter too
Why do you ignore me when I love both of you
I give you presents of love but you both decline
Please, can’t you listen to what’s on my mind
I’m alone and unwanted
Uncared for in love

But no one can hear me, not even my friends
They still believe I’ll be happy till the end

**Daddy**

© Veronika J.

It happened so, so long ago
Though it seems like yesterday
I remember it clearly
What I remember the most today
You told me you loved me
Then, left through the door
A house and a car were not lost
But the love was gone, and more

Oh, how I wish you were here
As I heard your last car beep
I knew she was here and the tears came down
I knew she was going to stay with me and never leave

No more laughing in front of a warm blazing fire
No sense in that because you’re a cold-hearted liar

You weren’t the steady figure I would adore
You need to love me to be a good dad

When I was younger, I was right
You just want me to be the way you want
You would never let me go when I wanted to stay
But all hope was gone, and now you’re just a shade

I had to find my own way out
It wasn’t easy, but I survived
I was so scared, but I survived
I would never have given up my ways
When I met a girl by my side
I knew just what I was doing
I had to do what I had to do
Don’t you hate how old I got
But I’m not that smart when you feel old
She is still your little kid.

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*Seperation* is a poem written by a girl named Sophie who experienced her parents’ divorce. Her poem embodies the emotions that an adolescent experiences in the denial stage. The major key word is WHY? WHY is this happening? WHY couldn’t I do something to prevent it?

A copy of this poem can be found at: [http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/seperation](http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/seperation)

*Perfect Life*, written by Destiny Ortiz, is another poem where a child experiences the emotions in the denial stage. She’s still unsure of WHY this all happened to her. This is an alternative poem because divorce is an event that individuals experience differently.

A copy of this poem can be found at: [http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/MzE4NDU](http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/MzE4NDU)

*Don’t You Want Me?* written by Jenny Miller, is a poem that embodies the emotions that an adolescent experiences in the anger stage. Adolescents often get mad at their parents for putting them through this experience.

A copy of this poem can be found at: [http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/Mzg1MTk](http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/print/poem/Mzg1MTk)

*Daddy*, written by Veronika J, is another poem where the child feels anger towards a parent. Sometimes children feel anger towards both parents, other times it’s just towards one. This poem shows another perspective.

A copy of this poem can be found at: [http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/daddy-im-still-your-kid](http://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/daddy-im-still-your-kid)
Fiction Novels:

*Sometimes Love Isn’t Enough*, written by Lurlene McDaniel, is a story about a seventh grade girl experiencing the effects of her parents’ divorce. Andrea is doing what she can to try and keep her family together and keep their secrets from being exposed. She tries bargaining with her parents to stay together because she wants to have a ‘normal’ family. She tries setting them up on a blind date until she finds out her father is seeing another woman. As her parents take on a temporary separation, Andrea is told she needs to take on more responsibilities at home. She becomes overwhelmed trying to balance school, friends, a new boy, the lead role in the school play, and her chores at home. Andrea struggles with the challenges that her new lifestyle brings. Many adolescents feel embarrassed when their parents are getting a divorce and try to hide their family life from their friends at school, which is what the main character is doing here. Although she keeps this secret from her teachers and best friend, she does eventually confide in a new boy that she has met at school. This is important because adolescents should feel like they can speak about the divorce experience without being ashamed. Andrea, the main character, experiences the thoughts and emotions that many adolescents feel during the bargaining stage. She finds various ways to plead with her parents to not get a divorce.

*Still Life with Tornado*, written by A.S. King, is a novel about a girl trying to express her feelings through creativity. Sarah has been trying to come to grips with her parents’ toxic marriage that supposedly ended years ago and has left a huge hole in her heart. Sarah’s brother reveals to her that her parents have only stayed together for the sake of their kids. She’s been dealing with her emotions for years and trying to find a way to come to terms with what has happened. She is depressed and has stopped going to school, showering, and engaging in social activities as a result. Her parents are too busy fighting to notice and feel like they can’t control their daughter’s actions anymore. Sarah’s brother moved away due to his parents’ abusive relationship. The entire family has been keeping secrets from Sarah, and now that the truth is finally coming out, Sarah is trying to find a way to cope with her feelings. This novel is unique because it displays the emotions that Sarah feels at different ages. It also displays her brother’s feelings towards their parents. The depression stage can usually last the longest out of all the stages and is usually when a child is referred to a therapist or psychologist. Finding a way to cope with one’s feelings during this stage, such as reading or art, is critical to helping an adolescent move forward. Sarah’s lack of emotions in the novel also displays the impact that divorce can have on making a child depressed.

*Happyface* is a unique book that is written and illustrated by Stephen Emond. It takes the form of a journal, to display insight into a troubled boy’s life. He decides to write this journal to document memories, express his feelings, and make sense of his crazy life, including his parents’ collapsed relationship. After his parents get a divorce and a tragic event involving his brother, this tenth grade boy puts on his mask and takes on the role of ‘happyface’. Happyface is forced to move into a new apartment with just his mother, and make friends at a new school. His father becomes a vacant figure who is battling alcohol addiction. Happyface displays his emotions through the private journal that his father got him for Christmas. His journal helps him accept this new lifestyle and forgive the past. Happyface is essential to this program because it is tangible evidence of someone accepting a broken relationship and being able to find a way to cope with the divorce experience. This book is suggested in the hopes that adolescents experiencing divorce will connect with the character and see how he has struggled in each stage, just like them, but has been able to find a way to cope with his feelings and free himself of the unhappiness propelled onto him by his parents’ divorce. He has taken a creative approach as a means of catharsis and it helps him better understand relationships both familial and friendly.