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Economic inclusion
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(a) Contemn and divorce
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influence?
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↳ Inter-penn influence on
   family therapy
↳ E.P. services.

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Sources of info:
   children's lit (Grimm
   and research
   w/ clinical studies
   Literature ──→ legal considerations
co-led workshops ──→ teachers
                 ──→ step parents
   casework ──→ children
           ──→ parents
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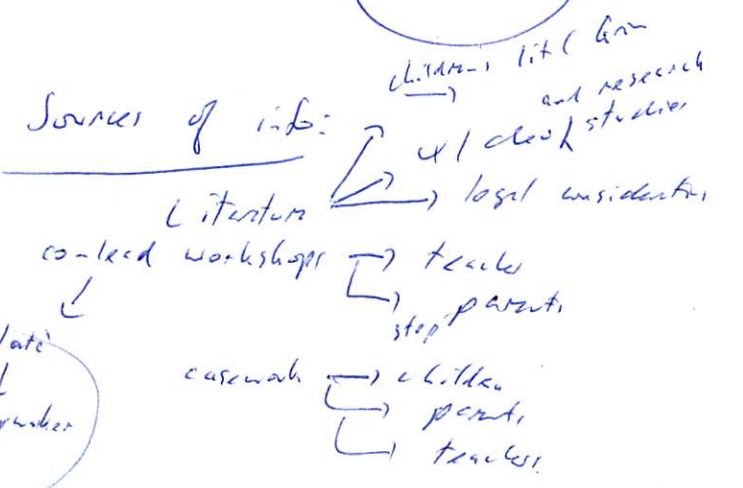
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Theory — systemic / family / ecosystemic approach
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11 Mind the steps! The primary school and children in second families

Gerv Leyden

Introduction

'Once upon a time ...'

The story of Cindrella, cruelly abused by her wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters, is probably for most of us our first encounter with what might be entailed in the loss of a parent. The message is clear. Do not expect to be loved and treated decently by your stepfamily, nor even protected within it by your own kindly, ineffectual father.

One anonymous, early nineteenth century writer described Cinderella as '... perhaps one of the most exceptionable books that was ever written for children'. The writer, pre-Grimm, recoiled from the prospect that passions such as envy, jealousy, dislike of mothers-in-law and half sisters should be present in children's literature. Yet the reality of life for many children at that time was bleak, and many also had reason to know what it was like to be brought up by a stepmother or mother-in-law.

The derivation of the word stepmother hints at some of the changes in social conditions. The old English word 'steop' was linked to death and bereavement, and also signalled the possibility of a new parent in the event of the death of the spouse. Hence a 'steopbairn' was an orphan, and a 'stepmother' was literally a 'mother-in-law'; a person who, following the death of the child(ren)'s mother, legally took over that role in marrying the widowed father. The prevalence of stepmothers in fairy tales (eg see also Snow White, Hansel and Gretel), as the Opies have pointed out, therefore mirrored family life at the time. One further point, not all the earlier versions of the Cinderella story featured a wicked stepmother, but that has been the convention since the brothers Grimm published their *Household Tales* in 1884. Today, most stepmothers still dislike the term because of the

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associations it continues to carry, but we have yet to find an alternative.

There is also uncertainty about how to distinguish between the various adults in the child's life once the family has reconstituted. Some people object to the term 'natural' parent on the grounds it implies other forms of parent (ie step-parents) are 'unnatural'. For the purposes of this chapter I will therefore distinguish between biological/natal parents and step-parents. I will also make the distinction between those who have custody and those who do not. Stepfamilies also come in different sizes and patterns. The permutations reflect the current living arrangements, and whether one or both of the adults bring with them children from one or more previous marriages. For most purposes it is useful to keep in mind the distinction between stepmother families, in which there is the biological father and a stepmother, and stepfather families, in which there is the natal mother and a stepfather.

My own interest in this area followed a marriage in which I became both husband and stepfather. Not wishing to accomplish for stepfathers what the Cinderella story achieved for the stepmothers, I did consult the psychological literature and was surprised at how little coverage had been given to second families. In addition, while schools, health centres and the church cover preparation for marriage/family life, second marriages seem very much a do it yourself phenomenon.

Fortunately, divorce, remarriage and the needs of the children have begun to receive more attention during the last ten years. In 1979 the Working Party on Marriage Guidance published its consultative document *Marriage Matters*. This encouraged a closer look at the changing patterns of marriage, the role of the then Marriage Guidance Council (MGC), now Relate, and the embryonic conciliation and access services. A number of further initiatives sprang from this in most parts of the country. In my own area I was invited to join with MGC and the local probation service in running a course for parents in the throes of splitting up. If parents had decided to separate, it should be done in such a way as to mitigate the negative effects on the children.

This course further highlighted the anxieties and needs of prospective step-parents and of custodial parents considering remarriage. As a result we ran an additional set of courses for step-parents, in conjunction with the WEA and the local university extra-mural department. The choice of venue was deliberate. We felt conscious that an agency base such as the MGC/probation/psychological service had connotations that might deter couples, whereas the WEA/adult education identity might enable the course to reach a wider prospective audience.

Both types of course that we ran were based on similar principles. They incorporated opportunities for the groups to identify their own

priorities, or curriculum, and to take an active, problem solving part in the search for solutions to any identified problems. There was also an 'expert' input from one of ourselves, deriving from our background in marriage guidance or work with children, or from an outside specialist. For instance, one session in the 'splitting up' course included a solicitor to assist in the discussion of the legal issues surrounding access and custody. The balance between activity based learning and specialist input seemed essential for a topic where information was inaccessible and feelings can run high.

Incidence

> '... and her father, a kindly gentleman, married for the second time ...' Cinderella.

When the term 'steopbairn' was in use, there was by today's standards, a high risk that a child would lose one or both parents through death. The prevalence of disease and infections, and the additional risks for women during childbirth meant that children were indeed being cared for by people other than their biological parents. In the latter part of the 20th century, following the virtual elimination of the killer diseases and infections, the major threat to children's security and emotional welfare has been the changes in the patterns of marriage and the family. In Britain, in particular, significant changes have followed the introduction of the Divorce Reform Act of 1969.

While the UK has continued to have the highest marriage rate in the European Community, along with Portugal, it also suffers the second highest divorce rate. In 1989 there were 394,000 marriages in the UK of which 36,000 were remarriages. (There has been a gradual decrease in first and an increase in second marriages since the Divorce Reform Act.) However, 1989 also saw 164,000 divorces, with an estimated half of them involving families with dependant children. Haskey's (1983) study of population trends predicts that one child in eight will experience parental divorce by the time he or she is ten, and one in five by the age of sixteen.

The effects on children of parental separation

> 'With the arrival of the stepmother, the father becomes a stepfather' Proverb.

Until the 1970s there had been a dearth of specific UK studies of the effects of parental separation and divorce on the children. Much of what we knew derived from the experience of social agencies, the extraction of findings from studies dealing with general child development, or work in the USA. One of the most influential American studies is that of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980, followed up

by Wallerstein and Blakesley 1989). While this has many pertinent findings, it does suffer from two major disadvantages. For example, its sample was heavily middle class, and the findings may not necessarily apply to children from different backgrounds. Further, participants also obtained free counselling in return for taking part. As a result we cannot avoid the possibility that this may have attracted a disproportionate number of families who were experiencing problems. Whilst not ignoring Wallerstein et al's work entirely, I will use it to supplement findings from other sources.

Fortunately there have been a number of different sorts of study in the UK in the past decade. One effective example of how to extract relevant information from well conducted National Surveys was provided by Elsa Ferri (1984). Basing her findings on the National Child Development Study of nearly 16,000 children followed up at the ages of seven, eleven, sixteen and twenty three, she came to the following conclusions. Stepfamilies were financially poorer than unbroken families, but better off than one parent families. Ferri suggested that remarriage was the most effective way for divorced mothers to retain their economic position. On the other hand, when separate families merged in this way there was also a likelihood of overcrowding. Educationally there was little difference between stepchildren or those in unbroken families on teacher ratings or pupil attainment in reading and maths tests. However stepchildren were less likely to consider further education after sixteen. Teachers also commented that fewer parents in stepfather families seemed interested in their children's progress. In respect of family relationships, while most children rated themselves as getting on well with their parents or step-parents, stressful relationships were more common in second families. This did not seem to affect the attitudes of children in stepfamilies towards marriage and having a family of their own, although there was a slightly greater tendency for the girls to opt for a marriage before the age of twenty.

In view of some of the bleak findings and assumptions about the effects of family breakup Ferri came to the encouraging conclusion that 'for the majority of such children, there was little to distinguish them from their counterparts in unbroken homes'. However, she qualified this by pointing to the problems and developmental difficulties of a minority of the children, in particularly for boys, and for children with stepfathers. Remarriage was not an automatic cure for the problems of one parent families.

One of the problems of evaluating the findings is that divorce is more prevalent in social classes IV and V. As a result, we do not know whether some of the effects that are reported relate to social disadvantage, or to the breakup of the family. If the family's emotional resources are already stretched by the effects of social disadvantage, the further distress of marital separation may also have a

disproportionate effect. This is important to bear in mind when we consider the judgements of people other than the children themselves about the effects of the breakup. In Ferri's study, stepchildren were more likely to be seen by their parents/step-parents as having behaviour problems, although this was not replicated by their teachers, once the variations in social background were taken into account.

A fuller picture is provided by those studies which have focussed specifically on children in stepfamilies, and the findings of Anne Mitchell (1985), Martin Richards (1982), Jacqueline Burgoyne (1984), Kath Cox and Martin Desforges (1987) have enhanced our recent knowledge. Anne Mitchell, in her interview study of children and parents following divorce, found that one in three parents reported behaviour problems in their children, which they attributed to the separation. Difficulties were particularly noticed among the boys. There seemed to be no set pattern of reaction, and for some children it took the form of truanting, while for others it might include clinging behaviour, aggressiveness (particularly among boys), or a deterioration in school work. The children themselves reported feeling upset, angry, or both.

Some of these reactions are clearly age related, and Mitchell reported that children aged eleven and under were more likely to have been upset, a finding that is not likely to surprise primary school teachers. Martin Richards also found that the effects of parental divorce on children were worse if separation came earlier (ie before the age of five), and argued that children adjust better if they spend at least 25 per cent of the time with each of their natal parents. Cox and Desforges reported that while pre-school children have particular problems of understanding what is happening to them, children in their first years of schooling (and later) also struggle with such abstract and complex concepts as separation, divorce, custody and access, regardless of what names we give them. It is also difficult for them to find the words to describe their feelings, or to frame the right sort of questions to ask in order to make sense of what is happening. In their later primary school years, as children become more self conscious and see themselves as members of the community and peer groups, they may try and save face and embarrassment by avoiding any discussion of the family split. In Anne Mitchell's survey, many primary school children believed they were the only child in the school whose parents were separating, and as many as a quarter had not told any school friend what was happening. At secondary school level, pupils were more likely to confide in a close friend, and to realise that they were not alone.

If we contrast the above comments with the ways open to the adults to deal with the situation, children appear especially vulnerable. Whilst support and conciliation services are still meagre, adults can turn to

agencies such as Relate, probation or social services or to counselling services. Adults are also more likely to make use of the support of close friends, a prospective new partner, work colleagues, relatives or even the advice columns of newspapers and magazines. I have also worked with parents who had turned directly to their children to help fill the void left by the absent partner, or to act as an emotional sounding board. As Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) pointed out, at the very moment children most need them, parents are caught up in their own conflict and distress. There is often too little time, space or emotional strength to give the children appropriate, honest information nor to deal with their emotional needs. Thus children are left to make their own sense of what is happening, with little information from the people who matter most to them, and often in the absence of the practical demonstrations of love that had surrounded and supported them through all their lesser life crises. Many children in Anne Mitchell's sample reported that they cried alone at the news of the separation.

While we are familiar with the developmental milestones that mark the path of primary age children, there are additional tasks to be negotiated by those children whose parents separate. Separation from one parent as often as not brings with it the effective loss of one set of grandparents. It may mean a change of school and home, and the arrival of a stepbrother or stepsister to share the bedroom that had previously been a private sanctuary. Above all, a step-parent may intrude and, from the child's point of view, become a barrier to the custodial parent, or be presented as a substitute for the absent one. While the child has to negotiate fresh relationships with the two sets of parents, the frequency and nature of the contact is largely determined by the adults, seldom in consultation with the children. Warring couples may continue their sparring through the children, who may become the unfortunate go-between or punch bag.

Perhaps one way of construing children's behaviour at this time is to see it as a coping strategy for a situation which, for them, is at once incomprehensible and insoluble. Children often continue to hope for, and may strive to bring about, a reconciliation between the parents and may see their uncomfortable go-between role as a possible means to that end. However, the solution to parental disharmony is not within the hands of the children and no matter what they do they will not resolve the adult conflict. For their part, there is much that parents can do to help the children manage their distress, for instance by providing information about what is going on, and reassurance they will not be abandoned. Many children fear that if the parents have stopped loving each other, they may stop loving the children. If the breakup is to occur, the way in which it is managed, and its aftermath, can at least provide the children with a positive model of the parents'

love and concern for the child which can override any turmoil between the two adults.

Workshops for teachers

'The wedding was hardly over when the stepmother's cruel nature broke out,' Cinderella.

At the time of our initial courses for step-parents, it was clear that most parents and children had to find out for themselves, as best they could, the implications of the parental split-up, and the consequences of living in a second family. This provided the incentive for our initial workshops for parents and step-parents, as well as for events such as the National Marriage Guidance Council study day for counsellors (see Brindley and Saunders 1986).

My own work with teachers as an educational psychologist often involved schools' concern about children whose work, behaviour or general wellbeing seemed to be affected by crises within the family. Primary schools are well used to providing a listening ear to the anxieties of the children and their parents, but sometimes the information received can be troubling for the staff concerned. If, as we reported earlier, one child in eight will experience parental divorce by the age of ten, this means as many as three or four children in each primary school class. The divorce statistics indicate that rates are likely to be considerably higher in schools serving areas of social disadvantage. While schools are not a marriage guidance agency, nor a conciliation service, discussion with teacher colleagues identified the need for some form of support for the teaching staff. Hence I became involved in planning a number of workshops for staff in the educational sector, including psychological services and other settings as well as schools.

Whilst each workshop was planned following consultation with the particular group who would be taking part, there were a number of commonalities. In terms of aims, the workshops generally set out to raise teachers' awareness of the issues of parental separation and remarriage, and to provide information about both incidence and the developmental implications for children. They also aimed to address policy and practice implications for the school. The format has continued to be a mixture of process activities and specialist information.

Many of the simulations I have used were originally conceived by the step-parents in the earlier series of workshops, and have been successively reworked. One typical theme is that of the stepfamily faced with decisions about how to spend a day out, when the parents and stepchildren are confronted with choices which reflect conflicting

loyalties between custodial and non-custodial parents. There are a number or different ways in which such workshop activities can be managed, the amount of guidance given to participants being just one example. However, my experience has been, that it is particularly powerful if the group or groups are given no more than an outline of the situation and the people involved and are left to work out how they are going to play it from their own imagination, feelings and experience.

Equally importantly, I have always included some form of presentation of information arising from the research studies in the literature, which can also be supplemented by contributions by workers from other agencies, such as Relate or access centres. This can be linked very constructively to the learning and findings from the participants' own activities during the workshops, and provides a basis for a good practice model for school policy planning.

Points arising from the teacher workshops

> 'Indecision is like the stepchild. If he washes his hands he is blamed for wasting the water. If he doesn't he is blamed for being dirty,' Proverb.

It is salutary for an educational psychologist to take part in a discussion with groups of teachers or step-parents on the theme of 'how do we learn how to become a parent?' There is frequent and lively mention of the role model presented by our own parents, and whether we seek to follow or avoid it at all costs. The example of friends' parents, descriptions in novels, films, television and, for good or ill, advertising, are frequently cited. Teachers also point out that their own children and pupils have taught them most about parenting. Occasionally there is reference to Spock's baby care books and articles, or to advice from a health visitor. But I have yet to encounter any unprompted mention of the work of psychologists, or psychological research.

While people use a range of reference points when thinking about their model of parenthood, when we ask the question 'How do you learn how to be a step-parent?' discussion becomes much more stilted and focusses on personal reflection. There certainly seem to be no obvious short-cuts, nor, as Jacqueline Burgoyne commented, 'no human equivalent of Barbara Woodhouse's equine nose blowing'.

Nevertheless, the subsequent question, 'how do stepfamilies differ from first families?' produces a flood of interesting insights. For instance, the workshop activities may simulate a situation in which there is a conflict of loyalties for stepchildren between custodial and noncustodial parents. Children are often forced to choose between options which favour either the custodial or noncustodial parent at the expense of the other. Not surprisingly, in such uncongenial circumstances they generally play safe and opt for the parent with

whom they are living on a day-to-day basis. Some teachers have seen parallels between that conflict of loyalties and the dilemma faced by a child when home and school are seen to be at odds. In both cases the child may become the go-between, conveying unpopular messages from one to the other. It is hardly surprising if messages are 'forgotten', and letters 'lost'. Denise Taylor (1986) described a number of different go-between roles in which children attempt to maintain a coping balance between themselves and the school and family systems.

Remembering the earlier comments on coping strategies, such forgetting or denial may be another strategy for coping with an adult 'Catch 22' problem that, for the child, is insoluble. Exploring the ways in which children may be used to convey messages between adults in conflict, and the coping strategies open to them ushers in the perspective of systems theory to help us look at the processes of communication between family and school systems, and the child's role in this.

One concept drawn from family systems theory that helps us to understand dysfunction within family or school systems is that of circular causality (see Dowling and Osborne 1985 for an excellent account of the application of systems theory to schools and families; Cooper and Upton 1991 for a related analysis of the school as an ecosystem. Both approaches question the value of a simple, linear cause-effect model).

Circular causality defines the relationship between events as being reciprocal rather than linear, and acknowledges that it is often more helpful to consider the 'how' rather than the 'why' of the relationship. We can see how this might work in the following example. Suppose that on the basis of research studies (ie Ferri, quoted earlier in the chapter) and our own experience, we assume that stepfathers are not interested in their stepchild's education. We might be able to support this by the subsequent observation that, indeed, they do not attend school functions or parent evenings. A linear way of presenting this might be:

(a) stepfathers are not interested in their stepchildren's education
(b) therefore they do not attend school functions or parent evenings.

This certainly simplifies cause and effect for us, and places the blame squarely on the broad and possibly chipped shoulders of the stepfather.

Yet the essential characteristic of relationships between people is their reciprocity; each influences the other, and in turn is influenced by the other. If we reword the same situation and present it in a circular fashion (Figure 11.1), we can highlight a possible interactive account of the same events.

> (a) schools are unsure of the stepfathers' role and may be uncertain whether to invite them in.
>
> (b) stepfathers are unsure of their role and don't make it clear to schools that they want to be invited.
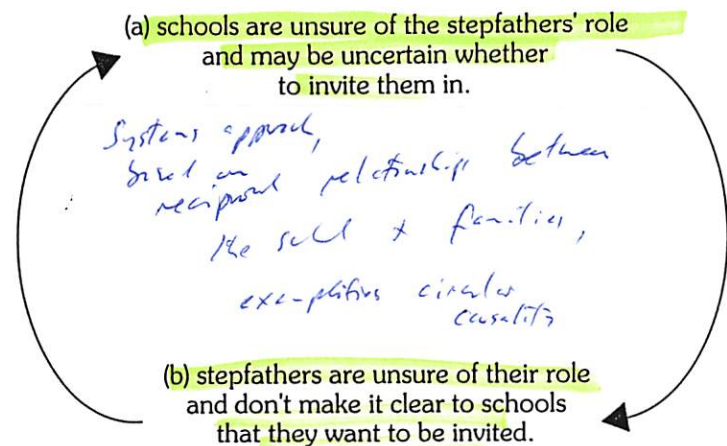
Figure 11.1: reciprocal relationships

Either of these statements could be taken as the starting point, and each could be seen as reinforcing the other. Once the reciprocity of the roles is framed in this way we can consider how to change the relationship without the necessity of imputing the blame or responsibility to one party. Of course there are many other factors involved. Jacqueline Burgoyne pointed out that society has a clearer idea of the concept of a good mother than of a good father (or stepfather), but the above reframing does free us from the limitations of a very rigid model of cause and effect.

We can also see how the notion of circularity applies to an earlier point; while we shape the development of our children, they, at the same time influence our parenting of them. And of course this is equally true of second families, with the additional factor that the children are equipped with an already existing model of parenting from the previous family. I still hear stepfamilies referred to as a 'new' unit, but they certainly do not start from scratch and bring the culture, language and history of the previous family into the new arrangements. This continuity offers security and bonding to the children, but may seem threatening to the step-parent who has not shared the experiences which created it and gave it meaning. Thus bedtimes, TV watching, mealtimes and decision making processes have all evolved after careful negotiation, in which child and parent have each influenced the other. Like many other organisational systems, family job specifications also possess powerful but unwritten rule books, and ample opportunities for reverse demarcation disputes ('Hey! That's not my job!').

In some workshops teachers have pointed to echoes of the above in the appointment of a new head or deputy headteacher to an existing staff, or where two schools merge on re-organisation. Headteachers, too, need to learn about the pre-existing culture, formal and informal rules and roles in order to understand and develop the school. For the staff, there may be feelings of uncertainty about the impending changes, their own place in the new scheme of things, and the extent to which their own contribution will be valued. The greater the uncertainty, the greater the likelihood that some staff will cling 'loyally' to well established, ingrained practices, resist change, and regret the passing of the previous head. And of course, the greater the resistance, the greater the temptation for headteachers to take decisions without proper consultation with staff, especially if they fear consultation would not be productive. And once again we find ourselves in a circular, or spiralling relationship. A systems approach can help both senior managers and staff to think about the significance of change in a more creative way, and to gain a greater understanding of each other's perspective and concerns as part of the process of accommodating to and developing from the new situation.

Concerns about the teacher's legal position in respect of children in second families were raised on a few occasions only, but these had proved troublesome for the staff involved. What the media describes as a 'tug-of-love' (which sounds more like a tug-of-war, with the child as the rope) rarely seems to be acted out on the school premises, or outside the gates. But where do teachers stand if, for instance, a noncustodial parent arrives unexpectedly to collect the child at the end of the school day? One social services nursery, well used to working with children who were the subject of complex matrimonial orders or access rights, had devised a 'contact box' for the child's record card. This box included the names, addresses and phone numbers of no more than three people eligible to collect the children. This list was compiled in negotiation with the custodial parent and social worker. With the exception of the need for a social worker, schools might consider such a practice as a routine consideration for all children, to supplement the daytime 'contact person' identified with parents as part of the admission information for the school record systems. Above all, teachers do need straightforward information about the legal position and rights of children and parents, and to be clear about terms such as access, custody and care and control. (See Hodder 1985, or Cox and Desforges 1987, for readable summaries of legal issues.)

Two other pertinent themes have emerged from the workshops with teachers, challenging some implicit assumptions about the nature of both families and schools. The first challenge is to the stereotype of the normal family as being unreconstructed and nuclear, comprising a mother, a father in paid employment, and two or three children. As we

have seen, within a pluralist, changing society many families do not fit that pattern. Yet such an assumption still pervades many discussions about the family, and relics of it can still be found in some curriculum treatments of family issues. Nor is it unknown in the professional attitudes of agencies working with families and schools, as in this extract I recently came across in a letter from a clinical medical officer to a school: 'The family situation is very strange, there being a father and stepmother and other children'. Second family workshops provide schools with the opportunity to review their own curriculum coverage of family matters, and for reconsidering their policy and practice in working with one or multiple parent families.

The second theme is that professional staff are equally likely to be touched by family life stresses and crises. Many will have experienced, or be experiencing, family breakup and divorce themselves. Working with children who are suffering the effects of separation can be particularly troubling for teachers when it provides echoes of their own distress. Those teachers working within a supportive school climate have pointed out the relief of being able to talk to colleagues about what has been happening at home, and the additional stresses this can produce for them in the classroom. There are, of course, many other sources of stress for teachers, many of which derive from the working day in the school, particularly following the nature and speed of changes in schools following the introduction of the 1988 Education Act. The importance of a supportive climate for teachers cannot be overemphasised. Teachers cannot be expected to be able to provide pastoral support, or a positive teaching relationship for pupils in a setting where they themselves are not professionally and personally valued and supported.

It is, of course, possible to have an understanding of the needs of pupils and teachers, and the ways in which they may interact, without necessarily embracing a systems perspective. However, teachers who are able and encouraged to bring their own personal experience of such issues into the school's discussion about the levels of support for staff and pupils are an invaluable resource. If we recognise that one marriage in three does end in divorce then we need to acknowledge that the effects will be felt among members of staff as well as pupils.

Points for schools to consider

'Happily ever after ...?'

It is difficult for us as adults to imagine what is meant by the fairy tale ending of 'happily everafter'. Much of our drama, television, literature and daily conversation is to do with the problems we have in living our lives. Tackling the problems we face at work, play and in relationships provides much of our energy, wellbeing, and sense of purpose. St.

Augustine confronted the same paradox when he posed the question 'What did Adam and Eve do before the Fall?'

While schools cannot provide the happy ending, they are particularly well placed to provide support for children following family breakup or any other form of emotional crisis or loss. Unlike other agencies, schools are not problem centred. Probation and social services, psychological, family therapy and other agencies all have connotations which some families find uncomfortable. The school offers continuity, and a familiar set of relationships with other children and teachers. Schools are involved with all children between the ages of five and sixteen, not just for those in difficulty, at the time of difficulty. And when the family breakup entails changing neighbourhoods and losing contact with former friends, and while not minimising the problems of starting afresh, the new school does provide instant access to classmates, teachers and reassuringly familiar educational activities.

It is not my intention in this final section to provide a list of do's and don'ts for schools. One reason for this is the points I might make have themselves derived largely from teachers within the workshops. Other teachers in different circumstances might have produced different proposals and emphases. Finally, teachers also possess the greatest amount of first hand knowledge about their own schools, pupils and community.

However, having declared at the outset my own personal interest in the topic of second families I would like to offer the following six questions for schools to consider when reviewing – as I hope they will – their current practice.

1. Are all staff aware of the likely implications for pupils of parental separation and divorce?

The earlier sections in this chapter provide relevant information from research studies and the workshops. School based workshops are an excellent forum for identifying difficult issues for a given school, or a particular community. The resource lists at the end of this chapter indicate where further information may be found.

2. Does the school curriculum reflect the current diversity of family structure?

This featured regularly in the earlier workshops I have described. It applies not only to the treatment of the theme of the family, but also to the books and other source materials generally available in school. (There is a very full discussion of curriculum issues in Cox and Desforges 1987 pp 116–133.) A list of books for primary school children which include family breakup or stepfamilies can be found at the end of this chapter.

3. What arrangements do you make for children who arrive outside the usual admission points?

During recent years, schools have been dealing with pupil admission and transfer arrangements not only with sensitivity, but also with a sense of purpose and fun. One implication of parental separation is that children may have to change school at short notice – often over a weekend. Many other children may be faced with just such a transfer for other reasons, for instance when parents change job. How does your school manage the induction of a pupil who arrives without the usual pre-transfer preparation to build on? Nigel Richardson (1990), an Oxford headteacher, ruefully described in the following terms the impact on his own children of moving from the home and town in which they had been born. 'And the next time I read in yet another stress quiz that moving is one of the riskiest episodes in life, I shall remind myself that children are just as prone to such pressure as adults.'

4. Are arrangements for links with parents appropriate for current family patterns?

How do you respond to requests from noncustodial parents for copies of school reports? Or requests from them to visit school to meet the teachers? Do you have a policy for routinely informing them about how their children are progressing? Are you clear about any changes of names among the custodial or noncustodial parents, and do you know how they prefer to be addressed? Are all relevant name changes entered on pupil record cards so that the school secretary can ensure that all letters to the home are correctly addressed? Are you prepared for meetings in school of both custodial and noncustodial parents to discuss a child's progress?

5. Are school procedures consistent with the law as it relates to children whose parents separate or divorce?

This question was at the heart of many of the anxieties expressed by teachers in the workshops. Teachers are not lawyers, and the law as it relates to families and schools has seen significant recent changes. Are you familiar with your LEA's interpretation of the Pupil Registration Regulations (1988), and whether the term 'parent' includes both custodial and noncustodial parents? And includes or excludes step-parents? Which of the parents are entitled to vote for, or become parent governors?

6. Does your pupil record system clearly indicate who has custody and who has access to the children?

This is important when parents or others phone or turn up at school asking to see a particular child, or take a child out at lunchtime. Do you know what the legal position is? And equally importantly, if you are out of school, will it be clear to whichever member of staff consults the records?

While we cannot provide children with the 'happily ever after' of fairy tales, we should not underestimate the value of the school in providing a sense of fun, continuity, purpose and achievement for all children. This is particularly true when parents separate. The educational and personal needs of children do not change, regardless of the changes which may occur in their family circumstances.

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Dowling, E. and Osborne, E. 1985 *The Family and the School. A Joint Systems Approach to Problems with Children* Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Ferri, E. 1984 *Stepchildren. A National Study* NFER-Nelson.

Franks, H. 1988 *Remarriage; What Makes It, What Breaks It* Bodley-Head.

Haskey, J. 1983 Children of divorcing couples, *Population Trends*, **31**, pp 20–26.

Hodder, E. 1985 *Stepparents Handbook* Sphere Books.

Hooper, A. 1984 *Divorce and Your Children* Allen and Unwin.

Mitchell, A. 1985 *Children in the Middle* Tavistock Publications.

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Richards, M. 1982 Post divorce arrangements for children: a psychological perspective, *J. Social Welfare Law*, May, pp 133–151.

Richardson, N. 1990 Moving experience, *Times Ed. Supp.* 28.12.90.

Smith, D. 1990 *Stepmothering* Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Taylor, D. 1986 The child as go-between, *Journal of Family Therapy*, No 8.

Tugendhat, J. 1990 *What Teenagers can Tell Us about Divorce and Stepfamilies* Bloomsbury Press.

Wallerstein, S. and Blakesley, S. 1989 *Second Chances. Men, Women and Children Decade After Divorce* Bantam Press.

Wallerstein, J.S. and Kelly 1980 *Surviving the Breakup* Grant MacIntyre.

Books for children

There are an increasing number of children's books dealing directly with parental separation, or where the story or adventure happens to include children in second families. Well written stories are a useful medium through which all children can explore relationships and develop their own understandings of what has happened to themselves, and to those around them.

Parents often find it difficult to talk over issues such as separation with their own children, and this is particularly so when they are in the throes of splitting up. Books offer an opportunity for adults and children to explore some of the issues in a relatively safe and neutral setting that is outside the immediate family context.

Alcock, V. 1985 *The Cuckoo Sister* Methuen Children's Books.

Blume, J. 1979 *It's Not the End of the World* London: Heinemann.

Byars, B. 1982 *The Animal, the Vegetable and John D. Jones* Bodley Head.

Carus, Z. 1986 *Run Cassie Run* Blackie.

Danziger, P. 1986 *The Divorce Express* Heinemann.

Fine, A. 1987 *Madame Doubtfire* Hamilton Children's Books.

Impey, R. 1990 *Instant Sisters* Lions Tracks.

Jones, D. W. 1977 *The Ogre Downstairs* Puffin Books.

Lillington, K. 1988 *Gabrielle* Faber and Faber.

Mahy, M. 1989 *The Haunting* Mammoth Books.

Mark, J. 1985 *Trouble Half-way* Puffin Books.

McCutcheon, E. 1983 *Summer of the Zeppelin* Puffin Books.

O'Connor, J. 1984 *Just Good Friends* Puffin Books.

Paterson, K. 1987 *The Great Gilly Hopkins* Gollancz.

Salway, L. 1989 *Beware, this House is Haunted!* Harpo.

Shyer, M.F. 1984 *Welcome Home, Jellybean* Collins Educational.

Strong, J. 1987 *Dogs are Different* A. and C. Black.

Townsend, S. 1982 *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole* Methuen.

Wilson, J. 1985 *The Other Side* Fontana.

Resources for teachers and parents

(a) Most local authority library services will provide a search facility for you, and most children's libraries will probably have copies of the above and other relevant books on their shelves. The two following volumes are annotated bibliographies which may provide additional information.

(b) Bernstein, J. 1983 *Books to Help Children Cope with Separation*

and Loss Bowker and Co. This is a comprehensive, annotated bibliography which covers the themes of changing school, the arrival of a new sibling, moving neighbourhood, serious illness as well family breakdown. Sections deal with fostering, adoption and second families. Titles are listed according to subject, interest level and reading level.

(c) Gillis, R. 1978 *Children's Books in Times of Stress* Indiana UP. An annotated bibliography, with a greater emphasis on children's feelings rather than on specifically difficult situations. While it does cover adoption, old age (including pets), death (including pets), friendships, brothers, sisters and grandparents, it is not coded in terms of interest or reading difficulty and the index is not very user friendly.

(d) Mitchel, A. 1986 *When Parents Split Up. Divorce Explained to Young People.* Different from other books mentioned in the lists, this is an information and guidance book aimed at helping young people cope with the practical and emotional problems they might face when parents separate. It is appropriate for use with children from the age of approximately ten years upwards. See also, *Divorce can Happen to the Nicest People*, written by Peter Mayle for children aged between 7 and 12 years, and published by Allen in 1979.

(e) Central TV have produced a drama-documentary video called 'Home Truths' which is also suitable for children aged from about ten years upwards, and can be purchased. They have also prepared an information pack for children dealing with parental separation. Details from The Community Unit, Central Independent Television, Broad St. Birmingham B1 2JP.

(f) Stepfamily (the National Stepfamily Association) produces a newsletter booklists and some very useful fact sheets. They also offer a telephone counselling service. Details from Stepfamily, 72 Willesden Lane, London NW6 7TA. Telephone 071 372 0884 (office), 071 372 0846 (counselling).