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Parent Well-Being in Divorce Education

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During the last century, uptrends in divorce and separation, single-parent families, stepfamilies, cohabitation, and same sex-parents have led to increasingly diversified family types in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2016a; United States Census Bureau, 2016b; United States Census Bureau, 2016c; Pew Research Center, 2015). This diversification creates an opportunity for family scholars to examine what aspects of families promote healthy child development and positive family outcomes, as well as develop programming to prevent negative outcomes. With nearly 50% of all marriages ending in divorce, family scholars are interested in understanding the effects of divorce on children and families (e.g. Arkowitz & Lilienfeld, 2013). Research has shifted from documenting the effects of divorce on family members to exploring the factors that predict outcomes and using those factors to develop responsive prevention-oriented education programs.

Parent education programs are a tool available to family courts to support families facing transitions such as divorce, custody challenges, foster placement, adoption, or coparenting of a child by nonpartnered persons. Many states mandate such programs in cases of disputed custody agreements for divorcing parents (Geasler & Blaisure, 1999) and refer a broad range of other types of clients to such programs. The research base around this sort of coparent education has been developed with a divorce preparedness lens and as such, these programs are generally referred to as Divorce Parenting Education (or DPE). Reviews of the DPE literature note that few divorce education programs explicitly incorporate theoretical foundations for their work (Bowers, Mitchell, Hardesty, & Hughes, 2011; Geasler & Blaisure, 1998; Fackrell, Hawkins, & Kay, 2011). In this paper, we contribute to the state of research on DPE by describing a theoretically grounded education program with supporting evaluation evidence.

The goal of this paper is to move the DPE field towards greater effectiveness in promoting positive family outcomes during and after divorce. The program described incorporates adult well-being as a core curriculum component in promoting positive family outcomes during and after the divorce process. We explain the Parents Forever conceptual model, discuss theoretical supports for our curriculum, discuss our analysis and results, and provide a discussion of results including an analysis through the lens of our theoretical supports.

Conceptual Model

Conceptual models support the process of program development, implementation, and evaluation by illuminating the intellectual and empirical framework upon which a program is founded (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Over the past two decades, our group has worked on developing a coherent conceptual model for delivering effective and impactful divorce education. Divorce education is one arm of a multitiered educational effort toward promoting overall family resilience. A key feature of our divorce education approach is inclusion of a unit supporting parent well-being (see Figure 1. Theory of Change). In our curriculum, we address parent well-being directly through topics such as financial education, developing a parent support network, reduction in interpersonal conflict, and promoting personal, emotional, and social health. We contend that improvements in parents' social, emotional, financial, and interpersonal well-being should improve child well-being because it improves overall parenting and coparenting capacity and other aspects of family well-being.

Figure 1

Parents Forever: Theory of Change
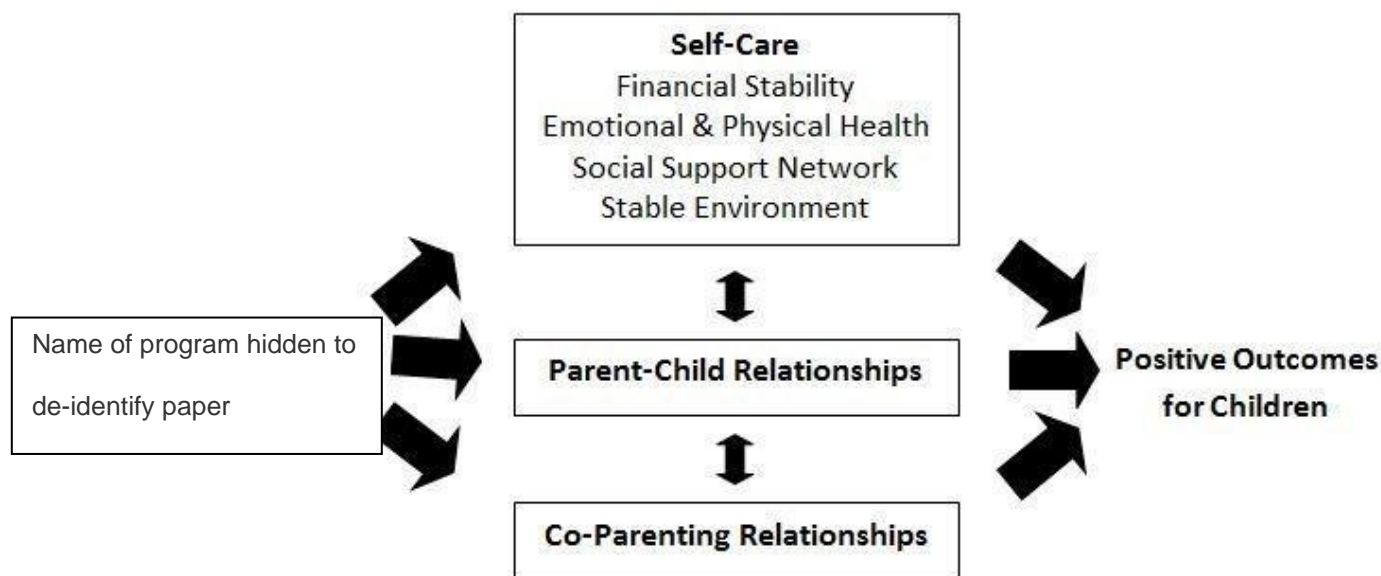
DPE often incorporates coparent education and parent-child relationship education because its goal is to improve child well-being (Geasler & Blaisure, 1998). Strong empirical research links the coparent relationship and the parent-child relationship with child well-being, and

effective coparent education would be remiss without them (Kelly, 2012). Our goal is also to improve child well-being, but we aim to heighten the program's impact by helping people explore how to develop or augment resources to meet the demands of coparenting and parenting. Programs focusing on parenting skills alone may provide knowledge, but that knowledge is best put into practice when a greater wealth of resources exists (as is the case with any form of behavioral change). In other words, parents who improve their self-care, knowledge, and skills for their own well-being are better able to support their child's well-being. A central tenet of the curriculum is to provide participants with the self-care practices, knowledge, and skills to improve their own well-being and, in turn, greater internal and external resources to be the best parent and coparent possible (see Theory of Change, Figure 1).

This conceptual model rests on the theoretical foundations of Ecological Systems Theory, Family Systems Theory, and Family Resource Management.

Well-being and divorce

The definition of well-being varies across disciplines, although some consistencies exist within certain contexts. Larger organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), do not have one consistent definition of the term "well-being", but they agree that "at minimum, well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment, and positive functioning" (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2015). The CDC's use of the term in the context of public health includes physical well-being, as well as components of mental and emotional well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health "as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). In the context of divorce and separation, definitions of well-being have related to specific domains of child well-being (e.g., self-esteem and social competence) and family well-being (e.g., family self-sufficiency and family resiliency) (Amato & Keith, 1991; Newland, 2015).

Regardless of which conceptual definition is being used, there are common themes related to well-being throughout professional and academic literature. Ideas such as happiness, satisfaction, and the absence of negative emotion compose a working definition of well-being (CDC, 2015). In the context of family, terms related to coping and

resiliency have been commonplace when discussing well-being (Newland, 2014; Noor, Gandhi, Ishak, & Wok, 2014). These family specific terms have been especially consistent when researching the state of the family during or after a divorce or separation. Parental separation is on the CDC's list of adverse experiences for a child (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 2015). Decreased well-being has been correlated to divorce and sometimes does not appear during the process of separation but emerges after both parents begins to navigate their new coparent relationship (Beckmeyer, Coleman & Ganong, 2014; Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski et al., 2009). Well-being is one way researchers have measured the effects of divorce or separation on the family, as well as measured the effects of interventions aimed at increasing the well-being of each member. Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar (2005) used "the family's organizational structure, interpersonal relationships, parent psychological status, and parent self-efficacy" as factors of family well-being (p.274). Bing, Nelson, & Wesolowski (2009) included child adjustment in their explanation of family well-being. Although each definition differs, they all offer a deeper understanding for studying the complexities of family transitions such as divorce.

Parent well-being is a key feature of family resiliency (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Kelly, 2012). Although much research has been conducted on divorce and separation and the effects of this transition on the family, a paucity exists in regards to the specific effects of this type of transition on parent well-being. In Lansford's (2009) review of the literature on child adjustment after parental separation, the author notes that "marital conflict and divorce increase parents' depression, anxiety, and stress, which decreases their ability to parent well and may in turn negatively affect their children's adjustment" (p. 146).

After divorce, coping strategies can have a helpful impact on parent well-being. Women who consistently perceived their divorce context as manageable and with meaningful resources reported less stress (Kulik & Hein-Cohen, 2011). In terms of coparenting, parents who were able to regulate their emotions and be intentional about tense conversations with their coparent reported greater well-being than parents who had frequent conflict and anger (Jamison, Coleman, Ganong, & Fiestman, 2014).

It is well acknowledged in the literature that parent well-being affects child well-being through the mechanism of parenting practices (Joussemet, Mageau, & Koestner, 2014; Coyl, Roggman, Newland, 2002; Shipman & Zeman, 2001). Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar (2005) provide a conceptual model that illustrates how social support is a key protective factor that influences parents' capacity to mediate child well-

being. Baker & Iruka (2013) looked at the influence of maternal depression and parental stress on maternal warmth, home learning stimulation, and cultural socialization, and the correlation to the "school readiness" of a child. They found a negative relationship between parental stress and the level of home learning stimulation (which affected a child's math scores). They also found a negative correlation with both parental stress and depressive symptoms of the mother negatively affecting the child's reading scores. Although this study is not in the context of separating families, the findings support the impact of parent well-being on factors that influence child well-being. Research indicates that parent coping skills can also impact the well-being of the child. Children of parents who learned parenting skills that promoted child autonomy showed increased well-being (Joussemet, Mageau, & Koestner, 2014). Similarly, mothers who were able to support their children to generate coping strategies mediated the negative influence of maltreatment on child emotional well-being (Shipman & Zeman, 2001). Coyl, Roggman, & Newland (2002) found that relationship and economic stress, maternal depression, negative mother-child interactions and spanking were all correlated with lowered infant attachment security. Further, they found that stressful life events increased maternal depression, which in turn predicted indirectly decreased child well-being (Coyl, Roggman, & Newland, 2002). Thus, the well-being of the adult attachment figure in a child's life impacts the well-being of the child through multiple potential pathways.

Theoretical supports for programmatic focus on well-being

In Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2004), families exist in a context that begins with the most specific levels (individual, *microsystem*) and extends out to the most abstract with each level playing a role in family functioning (*mesosystem*, *exosystem*, *macrosystem*, *chronosystem*). Individuals and families are both influenced by and influence their greater contexts. For individuals and families to function at an optimal level, they need to understand the context in which they liveand be equipped with the skills to influence their contexts to the extent that they are able. In other words, parents will cope and adapt more positively to their divorce if they are able to influence their own unique *microsystems*, *mesosystems*, and *ecosystems* in ways that better serve them and their children.

Family Systems Theory (FST) (Minuchin, 1974; Bertalanffy, 1968) is grounded in the idea that families act as a unit made up of connected individuals so that the sum of a family's influence is greater than its individual parts. Each individual within a family has an influence on and is

influenced by each member of the family, the family as a whole, and each of the existing subsystems. In FST, the family system is understood as a whole. Individual parts of a system cannot be understood without knowing how they fit into the whole. Children cannot be understood when pulled out of the context of their family, and the parenting of children cannot be understood outside of the context the parent's health and capacity, as well as the coparenting subsystem. In addition, families are seen as self-reflexive, meaning that humans can make their own behavior the target of examination, explanation, and goal setting, thereby manipulating changes within the system. In our inclusion of self-care, we explicitly acknowledge the self-reflexivity of humans and the capacity of parents to alter a system and change course.

From a Family Resource Management (FRM) perspective, parent well-being influences child well-being in several ways (Deacon & Firebaugh, 1981). Families have demands placed upon them, and they use resources to respond to the demands. The demands originate from many different system levels, including extended family, neighborhood, community, work, and policy. When resources begin to run low, parents may find ways to meet those demands that are less healthy for the family. By examining avenues to create additional resources, parents may be able to find a better balance of having enough resources to meet the demands of their family. This change can help keep their resources in good supply, which assures higher levels of well-being for both parents and children.

In the context of DPE, self-care, which is the first component of our model, may be excluded to focus on the direct relationship between parenting, coparenting, and child well-being. Efforts to improve the coparent relationship and parenting practices will be less effective if a parent is not supported to engage in self-care and attend to potential interpersonal risks, improve financial stability, and ensure their own emotional health through developing adequate support systems.

Research Questions

The influence of family and parent well-being and the intersection with coparenting has made its way into the literature on child well-being, but few have looked closely at the influence of this in the context of separating families. Much research is still required to more fully understand this unique family transition in order to strengthen interventions promoting positive outcomes for families.

The previous literature led us to ask the following research question: Does change in parent psychological well-being after DPE predict improvement in child well-being above and beyond that already

accounted for by improved coparenting? Based on the theoretical underpinnings of the program and prior literature review, we hypothesize that parent psychological well-being will predict improvement in child well-being above that accounted for by improved coparenting.

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of parents who took the Parents Forever online course and completed the pre, post, and follow-up surveys (N=272). At the time of follow-up, current relationship status of respondents included: 1) Reconciled with partner (1.0%), 2) Considering separation or divorce (1.0%), 3) Separated from partner (3.8%), 4) In the divorce process (17.2%), 5) Completed the divorce process (66.2%), and 6) Never married to the child's other parent (9.6%). While the large majority of participants (87.2%) took Parents Forever because they were in the process of separating from or divorcing their partners, there was a sizable group (11.6%) of participants who were not in that situation. People take the course for many reasons. Some are court-mandated to take the course because they are ending a never married, long term relationship. Others are attempting to establish parental rights. Still others are interested in taking a parenting course. Regardless of the reason for taking the course, we wanted to document the change that they experienced as a result of the education.

The majority of the participants identified themselves as White (91.1%), while other reported races and ethnicities include Black or African American (1.9%), Asian (2.2%), American Indian or Alaskan Native (1.3%), Hispanic or Latino (1.0%), Biracial (1.0%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.3%).

Procedures

After registering for Parents Forever online, participants were asked to take an online pre-survey before taking the class, as well as an online post-survey immediately after completing the course. They were emailed an invitation to take the online follow-up survey within 6 to 10 months after completing the course. An incentive for completing the follow-up survey was the option to be entered into a raffle for one of two gift cards valued at $25 or one iPod shuffle valued at $50. A reminder request to take the survey was emailed two weeks after the original invitation to the follow-up survey was sent. For more detailed information on the procedure, please see Becher, Cronin, McCann, Olson, Powell, and Marczak (2015).

Measures

The pre-test included demographic questions, a set of coparenting skill questions based on Brotherson, White, and Masich (2010) and Brotherson, Rittenbach, and White (2012), and questions related to coping and well-being of both the parent and the child. The same set of questions regarding coparenting skills, coping, and well-being were asked at post and follow-up. We analyzed post-test and follow-up instead of pre-test and follow-up because we believed that participants would be able to rate their behaviors more accurately after taking the course and provide a more valid baseline of their behavior for comparison.

Positive Coparenting. Positive coparenting was computed by averaging together four questions that targeted coparenting skills that incorporate positive behavior in the coparenting relationship (Brotherson, White, & Wasich, 2010; Brotherson, Rittenback, & White, 2012). Example items that measured positive coparenting include "How often do you encourage your children to spend time with the other parent?" and "How often do you feel you've cooperated effectively in coparenting children with the other parent?" Participant responses were on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often).

Negative Coparenting. Negative coparenting was computed by averaging together four questions that targeted coparenting skills that involve limiting poor behavior in the coparenting relationship (Brotherson, White, & Wasich, 2010; Brotherson, Rittenback, & White, 2012). Example items that measured negative coparenting include "How often do you talk badly about or put down the other parent in front of the children?" and "How often do you think your children have felt put 'in the middle' of a difficult situation between you and the children's other parent?" Participant responses were on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Item responses were reverse scored, so a higher number indicated more positive (i.e. fewer negative) coparenting skills.

Coping. Parents responded about their ability to cope. They answered the question, "Overall, how would you describe your ability to cope with your divorce or separation?" Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good).

Well-Being. Well-being was measured for both parents and children. Parents reported how well they thought they were doing compared to others experiencing divorce or separation. Responses ranged from 1 (much worse off than others) to 5 (much better off than others). Child well-being was the dependent variable. Parents reported how well they thought their children were doing compared to others their

age. Responses ranged from 1 (much worse off than others) to 5 (much better off than others).

In order to determine change in the variables over time, participants' reported values at post were subtracted from their reported responses at the six-month follow-up. This calculation provided a number ranging from -4 to 4 and was completed for each variable: positive coparenting, negative coparenting, coping, and parent and child well-being. A large negative score indicated a large decrease in the variable (e.g., reduced well-being, fewer positive coparenting behaviors, or more negative ones), and a large positive score indicated a large increase in the variable of interest (e.g., increased well-being, more positive coparenting behaviors, or fewer negative ones). Variables designated with a Δ represent this change score from post program to six-month follow up. Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted using a SPSS statistical software package (IBM Corp., 2013) to determine the extent to which child well-being could be predicted based on positive and negative coparenting skills and parent coping and well-being. Changes in coparenting behaviors were entered on the first step of the analyses, and changes in well-being were added on the second step of the analyses.

Results

Changes in positive and negative coparenting significantly predicted changes in child well-being over time, accounting for 8% of the variance in change in child well-being. Engaging in more positive coparenting behaviors and fewer negative coparenting behaviors was associated with increases in reported children's well-being (see Table 1, Step 1). When changes in parent self-perceived coping were added to the model, an additional 6% of the variance was accounted for, revealing an additive effect of coping above and beyond the continuing positive influence of changes in coparenting behaviors (see Table 1, Step 2). Parents who reported improvements in their own coping over time also reported improvements in how well their children were doing above and beyond the influence associated with parents' reported changes in coparenting behaviors.

Table 1
Multiple regression model results for child wellbeing by parenting behaviors and coping

Child Well Being

	Coefficient	Standard error	p	Change R^2
Step 1				
Intercept				0.08
Δ in Positive Coparenting	0.257	.085	.003	
Δ in Negative Coparenting	0.247	.095	.01	
Step 2				
Intercept	0.027	0.049		0.064
Δ in Positive Coparenting	0.191	0.084	0.023	
Δ in Negative Coparenting	0.259	0.092	0.005	
Δ in Coping	0.256	0.057	<0.001	

The findings for the second indicator of well-being, *changes in self compared to others*, are similar to the findings for coping. When *changes in self compared to others* was entered into the regression model, an additional 7.2% of the variance in changes in child well-being was accounted for, revealing an additive effect of how well one is doing compared to others above and beyond the continuing positive influence of changes in coparenting behaviors (see Table 2). Parents who reported improvements over time in how well they were doing compared to others, also reported improvements in how well their children were doing, above and beyond the influence associated with parents' reported changes in coparenting.

Table 2
Multiple regression model results for child wellbeing by parenting behaviors and how the parent is doing compared to others

Child Well Being

	Coefficient	Standard error	p	Change R^2

Step 1				
Intercept				0.08
Δ in Positive Coparenting	0.257	.085	.003	
Δ in Negative Coparenting	0.247	.095	.01	
Step 2				
Intercept	0.012	0.049		0.072
Δ in Positive Coparenting	0.209	0.083	0.012	
Δ in Negative Coparenting	0.159	0.093	0.088	
Δ in Self compared to others	0.210	0.044	<0.001	

Discussion

Our results show that change in parent well-being is positively associated with change in child well-being over and above the influence of parenting practices. This variable influences child well-being in a way that is not explained through coparenting practices alone. The findings show that parent well-being is an important contributor to child well-being. They also point to the unique influence of both coparenting practices and parent well-being on child well-being. Thus, including only coparenting or parent well-being yields less benefit. The additive influence of both of these factors provides the strongest support for child well-being.

Previous research indicates that divorce education supports improved coparenting behaviors, such as keeping children out of the middle of conflicts and encouraging positive relationships between children and all involved parents (Brothersen, 2010, 2012). This study extends those findings, suggesting that changes in coparenting behaviors are associated with improvements in child well-being over time, providing another piece of evidence in support of the value of parent education in support of coparenting.

The study further supports a budding area of focus in coparent and divorce education, focusing on the individual well-being of parents as they navigate the separation process. We found that for parents who improve in their personal well-being over the period of time following coparent

education, there are correlated improvements in the well-being of their children. This speaks to the value of incorporating parent well-being (emotional support, safety, financial planning) into divorce and coparent education programs.

Newland (2014) argues that overall system functioning has a direct impact on the well-being of the child. Through coparent education programs that enhance parent well-being, the entire family system is improved and thus the child's well-being stands to benefit. Most coparent education program models do not include a focus on parent well-being (Geasler & Blaisure, 1998). This may indicate that, when forced to prioritize subject matter, decision makers believe that a child's well-being is a higher priority than a parent's, and so child well-being will be the focus and parent well-being will be omitted. Regardless of the intention, our results show that focusing on parent well-being in addition to child well-being enhances the likelihood that child well-being will be improved. Why might this be the case? The first explanation is that parents who monitor and attend to their own well-being serve as a good model for the child (Crosby-Burnett, M. & Lewis, E.A., 2009). Children learn many social skills through observing their parents' behavior. We believe that if children see their parents successfully navigating challenging transitions, they will also be more likely to successfully navigate the transitions using the skills they have seen their parents employ. For example, a parent who practices good self-care in the form of getting enough sleep every night will model how to successfully develop a healthy sleep schedule as well as enjoy the benefits of getting a good night's sleep.

From an Ecological Systems Theory perspective, many of the factors contributing to parent well-being are parts of the family's exosystems, and the degree to which those systems are functional and healthy influences parent well-being. For example, a parent whose employer allows some flexibility around work schedules and expectations during a family transition likely creates less stress for the parent. The parent feels secure in their job and worries less about financial needs; they may find support through relationships at work; and they may find their work to be a welcome relief to the stressors associated with the family transition. The parent, in turn, continues to provide high quality work and contributes to a healthier family transition. This continues to diminish stress and results in the parent being a better employee.

From a Family Systems Theory perspective (FST), the connection between parent well-being and child well-being supports the theoretical principle of wholeness. When one family member experiences a change, it affects all other members of the family system. A change in parent well-

being influences a change in a child's well-being because they are part of the same system. FST also supports the idea that a parent experiencing greater well-being can create an environment in which all members of the system thrive. The parent who experiences greater levels of well-being creates an environment for the children that is safe, healthy, and enriching to their development. Because the parent is positively manipulating the environment, each member of the system benefits. When parents experience higher levels of well-being, they can fulfill roles and responsibilities within their system more fully and successfully.

From a Family Resource Management perspective, parent well-being influences child well-being in several ways. Families have demands placed upon them and use resources to respond to those demands. The demands originate from many different system levels, including extended family, neighborhood, community, work, and policy. At the family level, relationships place demands upon family members. Specifically, the parent-child relationship and the parenting role place demands upon the parent. The demands originate both internally and externally to families, and they are many and varied. For example, families are expected to provide safe housing for children; attend to children's emotional and physical health; arrange for and provide enrichment; monitor nutritional intake; provide healthy and effective discipline; teach mores and norms. Parents respond to demands by using available resources. They maintain a higher level of well-being if they have an adequate supply of resources to meet demands. If their resources run low, parents are required to find ways to meet demands using less healthy methods. If a parents' well-being ispartially defined by having enough resources to meet the demands of their family, then helping parents keep their resources in good supply is one way to help assure higher levels of parent well-being and, consequently, child well-being.

Limitations

All studies have limitations that must be considered when interpreting findings. In this study, there are several methodological limitations that caution against over-interpretation of the findings and provide guidance for future directions in the field. The demographic composition of this study is not representative of the larger population. The large majority of participants (91.1%) identify as white. This lack of representation makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the larger population.

In general, the field of coparent education evaluation struggles with inconsistent and not well-validated measures, and this study is no

exception. The coping and well-being measures in this case are assessed as comparative to other people's coping and well-being and are based on two distinct (non-averaged) items. This can bias the measure based on the well-being of one's social network. The positive and negative coparenting measures are published in other studies but have not been widely used or validated across broad populations.

Another limitation is that these data were self-reported from parents while they were actively in the divorce process. We did not hear from children, spouses, or other observers of the parents who may offer a different perspective about the parents' behavior. Furthermore, child well-being was measured using the parent's report (including change over time) rather than the children self-reporting their own well-being. Studies that examine multiple reporters within a family and correct for the non-independence of those multiple reporters are likely to contribute a much richer understanding to the literature about coparenting and well-being than studies that assess coparenting and well-being through one person's vantage.

Finally, we collected data at pretest, posttest and a three-month follow-up. For this paper, only posttest and follow-up are included, because the pretest and posttest are typically taken on the same day in an online environment. This confounds the immediate learning from the course with natural change over time while parents adjust to shared custody. Future studies should incorporate comparison groups and have longer periods of assessment that allow for a closer examination of the impact of the educational intervention on parent well-being, coparenting and later child well-being. Because this study did not have a comparison group, the analyses focused on prediction of change over time in outcomes (child well-being), linked to change over time in content taught in the program (parent well-being) based on initial response to program content, an indicator of program responsiveness. Future directions in research can further isolate the impacts and outcomes of this program.

Implications for Policy and Practice

With regard to policy, future work can determine the value of parenting and coparenting programs that focus on the well-being of parents as a mechanism to support the mental health and functioning of children. Focus directly on children is one mechanism of support; however, child focused efforts can be undermined if a parent is strained with lack of resources, social support, or other needs. In programming, the field of coparenting education has evolved into a framework surrounding divorce and remarriage, and as such has tended to stem from a deficit

perspective that divorce is harmful, and that coparent education is designed to mitigate this risk factor. In fact, for decades now, research has shown that children are benefitted when highly conflictual marriages are ended, especially if they do not suffer financially. If coparent education and concurrent evaluation were to evolve from a transition-based perspective that centered on the experience of transition, to one that is likely very positive at least in some ways for either the parents or the children, the types of studies and measures would shift. With this studyreveals a perspective on family transition as a potential boost for parent well-being and coparent education as an opportunity to bolster that opportunity. Future policy and research may reveal a richness of transition not previously explored with a shift in perspective.

Conclusions

There is an accumulation of evidence to suggest that coparent education programs for divorcing or separating parents would add value to their program by addressing parent well-being. Findings show that parents managing their own well-being through increasing coping behavior and perceived well-being is beneficial for not only the parent but also the children and the entire family system. By addressing parent well-being, we acknowledge that we are interested in the whole family thriving throughout the family transition. An approach to coparent education that goes beyond child well-being and focuses on family well-being serves the dual purpose of supporting both child well-being and family well-being. This could be through a direct mechanism of a greater resourced parent having an increased capacity for effective parenting, or indirectly in supporting their ability to effectively coparent. In turn, quality coparenting improves child outcomes. Supporting the whole family through a variety of mechanisms is good because it not only improves family well-being, it is also the most effective way to support child well-being. Relying on theoretical foundations of ecological systems theory, family systems theory, and family resource management reflects an overarching value that the well-being of every family member is important.

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