



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

# No Kids in the Middle



**Multi-family groups for separated  
parents in conflict and their children**

## Who is it for?

Parental separation and divorce are stressful experiences for the whole family. Often children are unintentionally caught up in acrimonious disputes between their parents, especially when these extend over a long period of time or result in contact with a parent being stopped. No Kids in the Middle is a therapeutic group for families who want to reduce the impact of such disputes on children.

The group is for families where one or more of the below issues are relevant:

- There are disagreements or concerns about contact.
- Contact with one parent has not taken place for a long time.
- There are disagreements about where a child should live.
- Parents want to protect their children from the impact that disagreement and/ or legal proceedings can have on them.

## What does it aim to achieve?

The group aims to lessen the negative impact that parental separation and ongoing parental disputes can have on children by:

- Helping parents find effective and non-conflictual ways of communicating with each other around parenting, their children's needs and contact arrangements.
- Helping families understand the changes they have undergone and move to a position where they can focus on the future.
- Helping children communicate their wishes and feelings to their parents without worries about the impact this will have on relationships.

## What is involved?

Prior to attending the group, we will meet with the parents twice to discuss their participation in the group. The first will be a meeting with just the parents, and the second meeting will include both parents and their child(ren). Following these initial meetings, families may then be invited to attend the No Kids in the Middle group.

The group will be held for nine consecutive weeks on Tuesday evenings from 17:00 until 19:00. The cost of the group is £3,900 per family.

## How does it work?

No Kids in the Middle is a multi-family group approach, involving up to 6 families together. Multi-Family Therapy is an evidence based approach that has been found to help families move forward and find solutions across many types of problems. Families with similar difficulties come together, sharing problems and solutions, and can learn new ways of communicating and solving problems through group activities as well as discussion. Parents are supported to identify destructive patterns of communication and to go about making changes for the benefit of their children. Families benefit from the experience and expertise of each other as well as from the therapists. There is a parents' group and a children's group which run parallel to each other. The families come together at the beginning of each group and during the breaks.

## How does it support my children?

Frequently, children with separated parents have to manage what we call the 'space in-between', and by this we mean the thoughts, feelings and physiological symptoms children experience when they are in the middle of the parental couple conflict. This can leave children often feeling very isolated and, at times, shamed. Within the group, each child is in a unique position where they can communicate their experiences, wishes and feelings with regard to their parents, without worrying about the impact this will have on their respective relationships with their parents. This is done through playful group activities, discussions and a presentation to the parents in the form of making a movie, doing a performance or a play, a dance, drawings, poems or stories.

One of the central themes within the children's group is to communicate that 'it's not their fault' and emphasise that it is the 'parents' responsibility' to make change. The parallel groups for the children and the parents allow the children to see that their parents are working together, which helps to release them from guilt and the entanglement of the conflict. The children ultimately benefit from peer support and connect better with their feelings and experiences which strengthens their resilience. If children are not ready to talk, then there is no pressure on them to do so, as being in the group and witnessing other children's stories alone, will benefit them tremendously.

## What parents say about the groups

*'I was very sceptical about joining a group the last thing you want to do is sit in a room with your ex-partner, but I have come out at the end and I have to say its one of the best things that I did'*

*'It has made me have a positive impact on how I'm going to reduce that parental conflict, especially around the children. It's a whole learning curve. '*

*'The exercises that you do when you're sharing your experiences in a safe environment with other couples that have gone through similar situations that you can actually relate to. As well as your relating to others, your children can as well and i know that was really positive for my daughter. '*

*'It's a really positive way of moving forward and reducing conflict between you and your ex partner for the sake of your children.'*

*'I recommend this group to anyone going through a separation or divorce. I think it's the best thing I did and I actually wish I joined the course at an earlier stage. '*

*'After the first couple of sessions, me and my ex started speaking. It doesn't matter what's happened, who's right or wrong. Ultimately what you've got to remember is that you've got kids. '*

*'Me and my ex are communicating, and I get to see the kids literally every day. A lot of it is thanks to this organisation and these classes. What lawyers can't do, what the courts can't do... these guys absolutely help prevent parental alienation. You absolutely have to work with the ex, and these guys help you do that.'*

## What children say about the groups

*'It helps my mum and dad agree with things'*

*'Mummy and daddy said it's ok for me to have two homes'*

*'In the group we do drawing'*

*'Children should join this group because it will make them bond more with their parents'*

*'It makes mummy and daddy be more kind to them (each other)'*



## How can I find out more about the No Kids in the Middle groups?

For further enquiries please contact the course leaders, Dr Morris or Dr Shahnava. They can be contacted through our Reception or by email [emma.morris@annafreud.org](mailto:emma.morris@annafreud.org) or [shadi.shahnava@annafreud.org](mailto:shadi.shahnava@annafreud.org)

## Referrals

Referrals can be made by contacting Heather Mayall, Clinical Support Officer, [heather.mayall@annafreud.org](mailto:heather.mayall@annafreud.org)

## Other languages and formats

If you would like this leaflet in a different language or format please ask at reception or contact us at:

Email: [Referrals@annafreud.org](mailto:Referrals@annafreud.org)

Telephone: 020 7794 231



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