

Phase I Final Report: Parenting through divorce

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Laura Backen Jones, Ph.D., Principal Investigator -- Phase I Project Period: 04-10-06 - 12-31-07

<u>Key Personnel</u>	<u>Role on Project</u>
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PROJECT TASKS

1. PRELIMINARY DEVELOPMENT: Convene development team to draft an outline of the content and create a design for program delivery. The central aim of this project was to create a parenting program uniquely tailored to meet the needs of mothers and fathers during divorce. The program targeted factors known to moderate the effects of risk factors on children's outcomes and relies on interactive multimedia to present *skill-based* video demonstrations. The evaluation activities were included to demonstrate the feasibility of an online multimedia divorce-education parent-training program. Our first task was to develop content material for use in the prototype program. The Principal Investigator and the in-house development team, along with the consultants who provided input on content: (a) determined learning objectives for the program, (b) drafted an outline of program content, and (c) created an instructional design for program delivery based on social cognitive theory.

2. INPUT FROM DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONSUMERS. We held two separate formative focus groups and five individual expert key informant interviews. The aim of these activities was to inform program development, including gaining information about the social validity of the planned program. Social validity assessments were included in the formative stage by collecting information from direct and indirect consumers of the program: separate focus groups of mothers and fathers and interviews with expert key informants. Information regarding program relevance, acceptability, feasibility, sustainability, and ease of integration were collected. In addition to the key informant interviews, the Principal Investigator was invited by the AFCC to present on this Phase I *Parenting Through Divorce* project at their *Seventh International Congress on Parent Education and Access Programs*. At that conference, the PI established connections with key professionals in the field – many of whom gave information that helped shape the Phase I program. This visit also led to the development of many contacts (including members of the key informant panel) that continue to influence development of the program; this relationship will also help in the recruitment of Phase II study participants, and will ultimately benefit commercialization and dissemination of the program (see letters of support).

Parent Focus Groups. We solicited feedback from our target population, the parents. Since the first year following separation is the most disruptive to family functioning, we wanted to gain information from parents in the midst of the divorce experience so that we might craft the program in a way that best meets their needs, with respect to both content and accessibility. We also included parents who had some distance from the divorce process because we believed that they would offer a retrospective view on what *would have been* most helpful to them. We asked similar questions from mothers and fathers, and gathered information to help us create a program that was sensitive to the needs of both sexes. Each focus group met for 1.5 hours. The Principal Investigator, an experienced moderator, facilitated the meetings. Methods adhered to guidelines developed by Krueger (1994): determine the questioning route, carefully recruit participants, use a skillful moderator, analyze the focus group sessions, and report the results. After the focus groups convened, we analyzed their responses by observing levels of familiarity between participants, examining patterns in the participant responses and sorting the content into content themes and sub-themes that indicate a point of view held by participants with common characteristics. We provided descriptive information on the themes or clusters of information and interpreted the information by examining how responses related to what we know from the research literature. We paid special attention to those areas in which there is substantial agreement across groups and types of participants (Krueger, 1988). The focus groups included 11 divorcing/divorced moms, six divorcing/divorced dads and one dad who never married but had a child for whom custody is in dispute. The average age of mom attendees was 37; the average age of dads attending was 38. One attendee was African-American, one Latino/Hispanic, one Asian; the remaining parents were Caucasian. Seventy-one percent of parents attending the focus group had daily access to the internet from home or work; all of the remaining parents, except for one, had access at least weekly. Parents averaged two years post-secondary education and most parents had two or three children. Mom's average level of annual income was in the \$10-

20,000 range while dad's average income was between \$20 and 30,000. Parents were divided with respect to current levels of conflict: about half of the group reported very high levels of conflict while half of the group reported relatively low levels of conflict. Levels of conflict did not differ by sex.

Mothers and fathers in the midst of the divorce process gave us first-hand information about what would make the program accessible and engaging to them. Participants also engaged in an open-ended discussion about their divorce experiences, sharing anecdotes that were incorporated into the script as teaching vignettes. Across groups, child custody issues were parents' central concern and many worried about the effect of the divorce on their children. Even when discussing the added economic strain of the separation, parents emphasized that their stress related to finances did not even come close to their stress about their children's well-being. Overwhelmingly, mothers and fathers indicated that they would like to have the best possible relationship with their child(ren)s' other parent but the tension related to the divorce, particularly when attorneys were involved, was tremendous. We asked parents to identify areas in which they needed education and social support so that we could tailor the core curriculum (parenting principles with strong empirical support for their effectiveness) and the instructional delivery design to meet their needs. Parents wanted to learn more about how to hold up under the stress of the process, how to improve their relationship with their co-parent, how to help their children deal with the emotional impact of the divorce, and how to manage day-to-day parenting challenges with their children. While most parents agreed that education focusing on these topics would be important, many were not satisfied with the court-mandated 4-hour class, and expressed a need for more extensive and accessible education – one that does not add strain to their already busy days. Parents wanted educational resources that they could access on their own terms. We outlined the plan for the program and the majority of parents indicated that such a program would be very useful to them, particularly if it included a component where mothers and fathers could share online support.

Key informant panel of experts in the field of divorce. The expert key informant advisory panel consisted of five representatives who work directly with divorcing families and/or individuals who have academic expertise in the area of families and divorce. We had two central aims in convening the advisory panel. We: (a) were interested in creating a curriculum that was truly beneficial to parents; one that would help parents protect their children from the stresses of the divorce process and ultimately protect their children's long-term developmental outcomes, and (b) aimed to create a program that would fit easily into professional systems serving divorcing parents. With these aims in mind, we convened the following panel: (1) *Peter Salem*, Executive Director of the *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC)*, (2) *Charles Asher*, family law attorney, mediator, and developer of a web-based self-instructional program for divorcing parents called *uptoparents.org*, (3) *Jeff Measelle*, clinical psychologist whose focus is the investigation of children's social environments to predict the emergence of psychopathology, (3) *Andrew Schepard*, Director of the *Center for Children, Families and the Law*, Professor of Law and Editor of the leading family law journal, *Family Court Review*, (4) *Cyndee Haines*, Family Law Attorney, counselor, and divorce parenting educator, and (5) *Keith Crnic*, psychologist and expert in the influence of stress on child and family functioning. This same panel comprised the professional panel who evaluated the Phase 1 program.

Key Informants shared their perception of what information and support parents need most, the barriers to parents gaining access to training, and the motivational and practical factors they saw as undermining parental engagement in divorce education. They helped us shape a program that will work efficiently with typical organizational structures and were instrumental to the development team by providing formative evaluations of program content and delivery design.

3. PHASE I DEVELOPMENT: Obtain and integrate consultant's feedback; develop scripts. Produce program.

The Project Consultants, -- Dr. Joan Kelly, a clinical psychologist and prominent researcher in divorce and effective interventions, and Donna Austin, attorney, mediator, and manager of Lane County Family Mediation, who has extensive hands-on experience with divorcing parents and the court system, reviewed the preliminary materials for content, usability, appropriateness, and cultural sensitivity. We integrated feedback from Dr. Kelly and Donna Austin, made appropriate revisions, and finalized scripts and modules 1-3 and produced the multimedia and web materials.

The production team, under the direction of the Media Producer (Technology Coordinator, Graphic Designer, Video Director, Video Editor and Production Assistants), developed the media assets (video, text, and web). All materials were produced in-house. IRIS Media's productions are marked by a focus on realism and natural situations and by engaging viewers through action and compelling scenes rather than with "talking heads." Video footage, instrumental in presenting modeled instruction, was filmed in natural home settings in order to provide a natural context. Actors were racially and ethnically diverse. Video materials were shot and edited on the DVCAM professional format prior to authoring and mastering to DVD. Web materials were created using Dreamweaver and Flash animation software. The web assets were produced to run on a

dedicated site hosted through IRIS' online service, which runs on standard platforms such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, and Mozilla.

At the end of Phase I development, we created an online training for parents with three modules: (1) Reducing Stress, (2) Keeping Children Free from Conflict, and (3) Building Your New Family. Each module contained the following components: (a) Video-driven lessons, (b) Interactive assessments, (c) Interactive mastery exercises, (d) Journaling tool, (e) Discussion forum, and (f) Printable Resources (see page xx for a complete description of component content). Activities in each module took about 30 minutes to complete, for total interactivity of about 60 minutes.

4. PROGRAM FEASIBILITY: Evaluate program effectiveness and demonstrate feasibility for Phase II. The focus of evaluation activity in this project was both on formative development and a demonstration of feasibility. Because the program was being created for divorcing mothers and fathers, we first examined the common and unique needs of divorcing mothers and fathers and we explored how best to develop a program that not only meets the needs of divorcing parents, but also fits well into existing systems of delivery for divorce parent education. Next, we conducted two evaluative activities to demonstrate the feasibility of this program: a pre-pilot evaluation with mothers and fathers, and an evaluation by an expert professional panel. This feasibility evaluation allowed us to examine: a) the effectiveness of the materials for improving parents'

What is the AFCC?

The AFCC is an interdisciplinary and international association of professionals and academics dedicated to the resolution of family conflict, with a goal to develop Models Standards of Practice for divorce parent education. AFCC has already developed Models Standards of Practice for Family and Divorce Mediators, Child Custody Evaluators and Parenting Coordinators.

AFCC members include judges, lawyers, mediators, psychologists, researchers, academics, counselors, family court commissioners, custody evaluators, parenting coordinators, court administrators, divorce parent educators and social workers.

knowledge, sense of efficacy and behavioral intentions concerning strategies for minimizing interparental conflict and b) whether the materials are well-accepted by both mothers and fathers, and relevant professionals. Two separate groups evaluated the program: (1) Mothers and fathers who have filed for divorce in the preceding 12 months, had a child aged 5-12, and had internet access: whether at home, at work, or through a library or school. (2) A review panel of professionals with experience and expertise in the area of families and divorce. Parents accessed the program and participated in the study assessments online. Professionals accessed the program online and completed a written evaluation.

Procedures for the Pilot Evaluation. We recruited parents with the help of our recruitment

allies (Mediate.com, Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, consultant Donna Austin, who is the manager of Lane County Family Mediation, letters to mediators and attorneys, and a manual check of divorce filings in Lane County). Professionals and academics were identified by the Principal Investigator and recruited via telephone and email correspondence and through personal contacts. A key ally in this effort was the *Association of Family and Conciliation Courts* (AFCC- see description at right). As noted earlier, the Principal Investigator, Dr. Jones, was invited to present the Phase I program at the AFCC's *Seventh International Congress on Parent Education and Access Programs*, where many key contacts were made. Two of our key informants are members of the AFCC, including Peter Salem (Executive Director) and Andrew Shepard (Editor of the *Family Court Review*, an AFCC sponsored peer-reviewed journal and respected source of the latest research related to divorce and family processes.

Evaluation by Parents. We assessed the efficacy of the program in improving parents' (1) ability to reduce levels of interparental conflict, (2) knowledge of conflict reduction strategies, (3) self-efficacy with respect to using the strategies presented in the program and (4) behavioral intentions to use the strategies. We also obtained measures of demographics at pretest to examine whether these factors affected program outcomes. Finally, we obtained exit measures of satisfaction with the program and program usage (see Measures Table Appendix C). Data were collected via an online questionnaire. Interested parents were screened for eligibility (e.g., time elapsed since divorce filing, presence of children aged 5-12). If eligible, parents completed informed consent online, and the baseline measures were administered. Following completion of the baseline measures, each participant was sent a key (code) to access the first of three online study modules. Participants received one module per week and completed a brief consumer satisfaction questionnaire after each module. Upon completion of the online modules, participants returned to the website to complete the exit assessment. Total time spent interacting with the program materials and to complete the assessments was 3 weeks. Parents were paid a total of \$80 for their participation.

Parent Demographics. Forty-three females and eight males participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 48 (mean age 34.3, s.d. 6.13). Ninety-six percent of the sample was non-Hispanic; with 77% Whites, 19% Blacks, and 4% Native American. Thirteen percent of the sample earned less than 25,000 per year; 37% earn between 25 and 50,000 per year and 50% earned over 50,000 – current income, however, would be substantially lower because these figures would predominantly measure combined income prior to separation. Ten percent of the sample had a high school degree or less; 45% had “some college” or a two-year degree; 41% had a bachelor’s degree and 4% had a graduate degree. Most of the parents worked full time (77%); 10% worked part-time and 13% did not work outside of the home. The study targeted parents with children aged 5-12; however, parents often had other children in the home as well. The number of children ranged from one to four (mean 2, s.d.1). Age of children ranged from 2 to 17 (mean 8; s.d. 3.8). Eighty percent of parents who participated had daily contact with their children, 12 percent saw their children weekly, 4 percent “other,” two percent monthly, and two percent claim to have seen their children rarely or never. Forty-nine percent of the sample had a co-parent who saw the children weekly, while 17% saw their children daily, 14% saw them monthly, 14% saw them “other,” and 6% saw their children rarely or never.

Clearly, we will need to beef up our recruitment strategy in Phase II to attract more fathers to the study. Plans to strengthen this aspect of the project are included in the *Conclusions and Lessons Learned* section from the Final Report. As an additional measure, we will block on gender in Phase II, so that we can reach and include a representative number of fathers.

Attrition. It is important to examine demographics of parents who dropped out of the study to determine if the program/web interface was differentially appealing to parents. Statistical analysis showed that those who dropped out did not differ by demographic characteristics. That is reassuring, but one aspect of the study that

will need to be strengthened is Phase II is the rate of attrition. It appears that our primary challenge will be in retaining participants *before* they access the program. As Table 1

Table 1. Attrition by Study Phase (original sample of 51)

Baseline	M1	M2	M3
11	5	5	1

indicates, of the parents who dropped out, we lost the majority of them before they ever even accessed the program. Once parents were engaged in the program, the rate of drop out was lower than the average rate for online studies, which is up to 50% (John Seeley, personal communication, July 2007). A top priority in Phase II will be to include additional measures to strengthen retention. We will be assisted by our consulting methodologist, who is considered an expert in online study development, and evaluation, and issues related to recruitment and retention.

Measures. Table 2 below shows an overview of the measures, assessment phase, and feasibility

Table 2. Measures, time of assessment and feasibility benchmarks

Measure	Assessment	Feasibility Benchmark	Progress
Demographics	Baseline	N/A	N/A
Conflict Scale	Baseline/Exit	Score improves pre to post	Met
Efficacy in Reducing Interparental conflict	Exit	Score improves pre to post	Met
Knowledge	Exit	Score improves pre to post	Met
Behavioral intentions	Exit	Score improves pre to post	Met
Use of program materials	Exit	75% of parents use program; 50% of parents visit web forum	Met
Consumer Satisfaction	Exit	Rated highly	Met

benchmarks. A detailed table of the study measures is included in Appendix C. The conflict scale was created from three existing reliable and well-validated scales. Items were selected that map onto program content (expression of interparental conflict in the presence of children). The scale has high internal consistency (.86).

Program efficacy. To test the efficacy of the program, pre-post paired t-tests were conducted on the four primary outcome measures: conflict, importance, self-efficacy, and behavioral intention. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations by assessment time point as well as the paired t-test results and effect sizes for all dependent measures. As can be seen, significant effects were obtained in the predicted direction for all of the outcome measures. Effect size calculations provide a relative indicator of how much an intervention has influenced the dependent measures, independent of sample size. Cohen (1988) defines a large effect size as $d > .8$, medium effect size as $d > .5$, and small effect size as $d > .2$. The Phase I prototype produced a modest pre-

post effect for conflict, and large pre-post effects for perceived importance, self-efficacy, and behavioral intention. These promising results provide support for the feasibility of the intervention approach.

Knowledge. Of the 29 participants who completed the posttest assessment, 21 (72%) answered all eight of the knowledge questions correctly, 6 (21%) answered 7 out of 8 questions correctly, 1 answered 6 out of 8 correctly, and 1 answered 5 out of eight correctly. Thus, 27 (93%) of the participants scored 88% correct or higher on the post knowledge test.

Table 3. Pre-Post Descriptive Statistics and Paired *t* -test Results

Scale	Pretest		Posttest		Test Statistics		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Paired t-value	p-value	Cohen's d
Conflict	2.74	0.94	2.38	0.68	2.39	.024	0.37
Importance ¹	3.78	0.97	4.83	0.37	-5.51	<.001	1.08
Self-efficacy ¹	3.40	0.84	4.54	0.40	-6.82	<.001	1.36
Behavioral intention ¹	2.71	0.95	4.59	0.43	-9.18	<.001	1.98

¹ Retrospective pretest scale collected at posttest

Usage. Our usage benchmark for Phase I was that at least 50% of parents engaged in the program materials. Of the parents who completed all three modules, 100% of them engaged in the program materials. This figure, however, was influenced by the design of the program. During the Phase I feasibility trial, we had “required” components and “optional components.” During development, expert key informants shared information with us that led us to decide on a “tunnel” instructional design: the components were “required,” parents had to complete that section to move forward in the program. We recognize that this limits what we can learn about what components parents would choose to engage in. To elucidate what aspects of the program are most interesting/important to parents, we will open the program in Phase II to include more optional components and examine usage of each component as part of our Phase II evaluation.

Efficacy and Behavioral Intentions. We utilized a retrospective pretest (RPT) for this measure. The RPT is administered at the same time as the posttest, that is, respondents are asked to answer questions about their level of understanding or skill after the intervention occurs. They are then asked to think back to their understanding prior to the intervention. The RPT can also help to avoid a response-shift effect (Howard, 1980) which occurs when a respondent's frame of reference or evaluation standard changes significantly during an intervention. This is particularly important with a parenting intervention. Results from traditional pretest questions may be misleading when assessing parenting understanding. Parents may not be aware of what they don't know coming into a program (Pratt, McGuigan, and Katzev, 2000). Parents in this evaluation expressed again and again that they had no idea how much interparental conflict and their own stress affected their children's health. If they had been asked pretest how well they thought they were doing in this area, they may have expressed an overly optimistic view. In Phase II we will include both a pretest and retrospective pretest, however, to examine how parents' responses in the pre and retrospective pre compare.

Social Validity/Utility. An important part of our evaluation was to assess how parents responded to the website. Table 4 summarizes user satisfaction with the website and associated components. Overall, parents found the website easy to access and navigate, the web content easy to understand, and they expressed that they were able to complete tasks efficiently.

Table 4. Parent feedback on website/program	Strongly/mostly agree	Slightly agree - disagree
Website was visually appealing	87%	13%
Easy to move from one page to another	90%	10%
Site organization easy to understand	93%	7%
Individual pages well designed	93%	7%
Terminology used is clear	94%	6%
Content of website met expectations	90%	10%
Able to complete tasks in reasonable amount of time	94%	6%

As noted earlier, the complete Phase I program consisted of the following three online modules (see Appendix A): (1) Reducing Stress, (2) Keeping Children Free from Conflict, and (3) Building Your New Family. Each module contained the following components: (a) Video-driven lessons, (b) Interactive assessments, (c) Interactive mastery exercises, (d) Journaling tool, and (e) Discussion forum, and

As noted earlier, the complete Phase I program consisted of the following three online modules (see Appendix A): (1) Reducing Stress, (2) Keeping Children Free from Conflict, and (3) Building Your New Family. Each module contained the following components: (a) Video-driven lessons, (b) Interactive assessments, (c) Interactive mastery exercises, (d) Journaling tool, and (e) Discussion forum, and

(f) Printable Resources. Activities in each module take about 30 minutes to complete, for total interactivity of about 60 minutes.

In the first module: "Reducing Stress," parents' stress with the divorce process was normalized and the potential effects of stress on parent's own health and the health of their family were described. Parents learned a strategy for taking a "stress rest" rather than reacting. Associated printables contained more tips. When asked whether the program gave them new ideas for dealing with stress, 85% of parents indicated that it did. With respect to the "Quick Tips for Reducing Stress" printable, a parent commented, "I like the fact that I can print it out, post it, and be reminded whenever needed. Another parent said, "The message was very clear...fun and easy guidelines to reduce stress for mommies like me on the move."

The second module, "Keeping Children Free from Conflict," explored the effects of interparental conflict on children. Common ways that parents involve children unnecessarily were presented, and then more appropriate, effective alternatives were shown. Module 2 also teaches a specific skill to improve communication (the "Move-forward Message"). Eighty-five percent of parents said that the program motivated them "quite a bit" to "very much" to improve their relationship with their co-parent. One father commented, "I feel the video was excellent and it really exposed what we do as adults, how we behave towards our children that can affect them directly or indirectly in the long run. It gave us a clear presentation as to how to correct ourselves, and carry on in a more helpful way towards ourselves and others." Regarding the printable "Parenting Styles and Conflict," one parent said it, "set out easy to understand instructions on how to change bad habits and express myself in more constructive and positive ways."

Finally, the third module, "Building Your New Family" focused on reorganizing family life with an emphasis on the developmental needs of children and the value of routines. The video sequence described a step-by-step process for transitioning from one place to another with children (e.g., from one parent's home to another; from childcare to home, etc.). Seventy-six percent of parents indicated that they would make changes in their transition routines, based on what they learned. Ideas for changes were abundant, including, "I have set up daily family routines, such as eating dinner together," "I am taking care of myself and preparing to stay calm and upbeat during drop-offs and pick-ups," "I had no idea that verbal altercations and statements were so damaging. I am proceeding with caution re: children's father," and: "I react positively to what my children have to say about the fun they've had at my exes."

One of our Phase I goals was to create a program that would immediately engage the learner, motivating them to learn. Feedback from parents gives us confidence that we achieved this goal. Parents were very enthusiastic about the program. The mean rating of overall program quality was 4.8 out of 5 (5= high quality); all parents indicated that the program was useful to them, with 85% of parents rating the program as very much or quite a bit useful. Another parent said the video was, "straightforward and easy to understand. The points made were useful and very relevant to me personally." Ninety-three percent of parents found the ideas easy to understand and 97% of parents agreed with the ideas presented in the program.

In the program, parents learned to focus on managing their own behavior, rather than trying to change others' behavior (including the co-parent). Ninety percent of parents said that the program helped them see how they could change their own behavior to improve their situation. One hundred percent of parents said that they would likely change some strategies related to interacting with their co-parent or children, with 83% indicating that they would change "quite a bit" to "very much." A common theme in the feedback from parents was that they had no idea that their behaviors had such an impact on their children's development and many expressed a conviction to improve. One parent commented, "My children are the most important people to me in the whole world and I will not put them in the middle [of co-parent conflict] again!" Another parent commented, "I plan to take more breaks and really stop and think about what I am doing...instead of getting angry immediately...it might take some time but in the end, I think it will be well worth it."

Web Community. The web community was enthusiastically used by parents. Of the parents who accessed all three modules, 100% posted at least once to the forum. We believe one reason for this success was the context in which it was used. Based on suggestions from key informants, parent's participation in the web community was one part of a carefully crafted instructional design, rather than a stand-alone component. Using the journaling function, parents set behavior change goals at the end of each module and then were encouraged to visit the web community to share their experiences with trying the new behaviors. Parents also chose to set up their own topics within the forum, so they experienced a balance of guided vs. free contribution. Typical reactions to this feature included, "It's nice to know that there are other people going through the same things as me," and, "It's not always easy to find people to talk to about how hard it is to be a parent going through divorce...it makes me feel better because it takes me out of my situation and helps me see things more objectively," and "I could compare responses and ideas and I was able to incorporate several into my situation." Appendix B contains a full description of our web community.

Evaluation by Professionals. The professional evaluation was conducted by our expert Key Informant panel and the project consultants. Project staff developed a brief questionnaire of approximately 20 items using both Likert-type scales and open-ended questions. We designed these items to assess professionals' views concerning the social validity, systematic fit, and practical utility of the program in their work with divorcing families. One KI was unable to participate because he was out of the country. Key informants were paid \$75. All of the reviewers have post-graduate degrees and represented a range of professionals concerned with divorcing families (see Key Informant list). Year's experience working with divorcing families ranged from 18 to 35.

Table 4. Professional Review - Quantitative Results	Mean
How relevant is the content of the program to the issues you encounter with divorcing parents?	4.7
How would you rate the overall quality of the materials?	4
How engaging did you find the materials ?	4
How user-friendly were the materials?	4.3
How easy for divorcing parents to understand the ideas?	5
Would you recommend this program to divorcing parents?	4.2

Our feasibility benchmark was that the professionals rate the program highly (at the upper ends of Likert scales). Table 4 summarizes reviewer's mean ratings by scale (scale range 1-5; five best/most). On the whole, reviewers were very impressed with the program. When asked about overall quality of the program, key informant Peter Salem, Executive Director of the AFCC said, "I think that the format is easy, the various options were good and reinforced the learning from one to the others. The quality of video and particularly of the acting was strong ... there was diversity which isn't always easy to pull off."

Another key informant, psychologist Keith Crnic, said, "Easy to use. Engaging. Real-looking people in the vignettes. Exercises...target appropriate skills." Consultant, Joan Kelly, commented, "Lively and well acted vignettes, verbal and written points (are both) relevant to separation/divorce."

Some professionals expressed concern that parents might need more guidance in navigating the online program. Parents, on the other hand, overwhelmingly told us that the online interface was very easy to use. One parent even referred to it as "seamless." This difference might reflect age of the user/experience with the internet. The average age of our reviewers was 55, and the average age of parents using the program was 34, so it's possible that the younger parents were more comfortable navigating a web-based program. On the other hand, it is possible that the 22% attrition from screening to the baseline assessment might include some individuals who were not comfortable accessing the program from the web, leaving us with participants who were already comfortable accessing programming from the web. With this in mind, we will include more rigorous usability trials in Phase II. Although the attrition analysis showed no demographic differences among participants who dropped out, we will conduct more careful follow ups with individuals who drop out in Phase II to learn more about the factors associated with their withdrawal from the study. We will also include suggestions for improving ease of use and website navigation from our expert key informants and consultants in our Phase II development. Additional feedback from the professional panel will also be incorporated in Phase II (e.g., what other topics are pertinent, rephrasing certain terms for sensitivity, navigation tips, suggestions for content). An important part of our Phase II activities will be to consolidate feedback from parents and professionals during Phase I to inform the Phase II development. Because most of the key informants will continue their involvement in Phase II, and thus will be very familiar with the Phase I program, we expect they will play a key role in guiding development of the program.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

In Phase I, we accomplished our two primary goals. We: (1) developed an online multimedia program for divorcing mothers and fathers that consisted of multiple skill-building components and a moderated online community, and (2) conducted a feasibility evaluation of the program with a representative group of parents and a professional panel. Program development was an iterative process informed by our expert consultants, Joan Kelly and Donna Austin and an expert advisory panel of key informants represented by a range of professionals concerned with divorce parent education. The Principal Investigator established relationships with top experts in the field and procured their agreement to participate in both phases of the project. The Phase I program was presented to a large audience of divorce academics and professionals from around the world at the AFCC's *Seventh International Congress on Parent Education and Access Programs* and received an extremely enthusiastic response. This relationship with AFCC is important because their members come

together to exchange information, share perspectives and work collaboratively on projects; currently, the AFCC is drafting standards of practice for divorce parenting education so they are well-positioned to inform development and ultimately, to help us commercialize the program upon its completion. Notably, one of the key informants, Andrew Schepard, Editor of the peer-reviewed journal, *Family Court Review* has agreed to accept for publication results of our Phase II evaluation study (Schepard, personal communication, July, 2006).

We demonstrated that we could produce online parent education materials suitable for divorcing parents. Direct and indirect consumers found the materials to be attractive and engaging and appropriate for the population. Although the sample was small, sample characteristics both professionals and parents was adequately representative of the population; several types of professionals were represented and the demographics of the families match up well with circumstances generally cited in larger studies. The modest reduction in interparental conflict we obtained shows that the program can have an effect on one of the most damaging parental practices during divorce: co-parent conflict. It was moving to read the comments from mothers and fathers, particularly with respect to the changes they were making after participating in the program. Because interparental conflict is the biggest predictor of maladjustment for children of divorce, and up to 75% of parents have overt conflict in the presence of their children, it was important to create material that would motivate parents to reduce conflict and equip them to make the changes necessary to do this.

We believe these results provide ample justification for continuing with development of the complete curriculum. We recognize that even though the results from the feasibility test are positive, with such a small sample and a non-experimental design, we are limited in the generalizations we can make. Moreover, we will need to strengthen our recruitment plan to attract more fathers to the evaluation and we also need to include more measures to ensure that we maximize participant retention in the study. Furthermore, our Phase I user data are subjective. In Phase II, we will conduct an objective analysis of user patterns and program usage, including program and page visit frequency. Finally, we will beef up usability testing so that we can create a program that is easy for parents with a wide range of web experience to use.

Recruiting Fathers. With respect to recruiting fathers into the study, we will block on recruitment to ensure we recruit a sufficient sample and we will follow recommendations given (Phares, 1992; 1995; Sherr, Dave, Lucas, Senior, & Nazareth, 2005). With the assistance of our recruitment allies (see letters of support) we will make in-person visits to the required *Focus on Children* classes (mandatory for divorcing parents with children in this area) in Lane and Linn counties and appeal to fathers for their participation. We will also design flyers and recruitment materials that are more likely to appeal to fathers and we will target web forums and organizations that attract divorcing fathers.

Maximizing Retention. Efforts to reduce attrition will be accomplished using a multi-pronged approach as recommended by experts (Reips, 2002; Joinson & Reips, 2005; Goritz, 2006), including our consulting methodologist who will take a more active role in the Phase II evaluation. We will: (1) use screening strategies designed to “cull out” less motivated individuals; interested individuals will be asked to complete some multi-step preliminary tasks that require their sustained engagement. (2) appeal to parents in terms of their contribution to science – the importance to themselves and to others of being fully engaged in the research project. (3) include some initial warm and inviting personal contact (4) send reminders, and (5) make payment immediately after each task is finished.

Phase II Goals. The primary goal of Phase II will be to continue the development of instructional materials and to conduct an experimental randomized trial of the theory-based intervention with 318 divorced parents. Participants will be randomly assigned to either the PTD program (Treatment) or a web-based information-only condition (Control).