

Title: Evaluating the Sandcastles Program: A Group Intervention for Children of Divorce

Abstract

The Sandcastles program has been utilized nationwide as a one-time group intervention to assist children of divorcing parents. For several years Miami-Dade family court services mandated participation in the program for divorcing or separating families. Currently, there is a paucity of research and evaluation to ascertain the efficacy of the program. This symposium will provide details and discussion regarding the planning and process used to establish an evaluation plan to assess the effectiveness of the Sandcastles program for families in Miami-Dade County. Any preliminary outcomes available at the time of the symposium will also be shared.

Description of the activity

The Sandcastles program is a three-and-a-half-hour, onetime group session for children of divorce between the ages of six and seventeen. The last half hour includes the children's parents and focuses on improving communication between parent and child. The objectives of the program are for children to: (1) develop self-expression and problem-solving skills, (2) learn appropriate means of expressing anger and other intense emotions, (3) reach a better understanding of the reality of divorce, and (4) recognize their own unique qualities and strengths. The Sandcastles program has been implemented in several jurisdictions across the country. Up until recently, no final divorce decree or legal separation would be granted in Miami-Dade County to any couple whose minor children did not participate in the program. However, a new judge appointed to Miami-Dade family court services lifted this mandate pending an evaluation of the effectiveness of the program. The Sandcastles program is offered as a course three or four times a month at Miami-Dade College.

In response to the lifting of the mandate, a supervisor for family court services, sought evaluation support from a local research alliance. The proposed symposium presentation will address the development of the relationship among all stakeholders (practitioners, university faculty evaluators, and graduate student research assistants), the collaborative activities devoted to developing a plan to evaluate the efficacy of the Sandcastles program, and the status of the research.

Goals of the symposium

The goals of the symposium are to explain the purpose and process of the Sandcastles evaluation as requested by Miami-Dade family court services and conducted via collaboration among practitioners, students, and faculty within the court system and local institutions of higher education.

Format/agenda of the symposium

The Moderator will introduce the presentation and panelists. The five panelists will discuss (a) the background of the Sandcastles program and its history with Miami-Dade family court services, (b) the rationale and purpose of the evaluation of the Sandcastles program, (c) the process of developing the collaborative evaluation team and planning the evaluation, and (d) any preliminary outcomes available at the time of the presentation. Additional details below.

The Moderator will provide background on the model of collaboration, introduce the presentation and panelists, and field audience questions.

Panelist 1, the lead researcher, will discuss the process of developing the collaborative evaluation team, development of the relationship to support a rigorous evaluation, how the team was compiled, the rationale and purpose of the evaluation of the Sandcastles program, development of the evaluation plan, and status of the research.

Panelist 2, a supervisor for family court services, will present the background of the Sandcastles program, its history with Miami-Dade family court services, and the decision to seek evaluation support from the community.

Panelist 3, the coordinator of the Sandcastles program, will present the history of the program, how it was selected, and how it has been implemented and sustained in Miami-Dade County.

Panelist 4, an expert with a long-standing reputation for rigorous evaluation of education programs, will discuss the research methodology and statistical models that support the evaluation.

Panelist 5, a graduate student research assistant will present preliminary outcomes, the plan for moving forward, and the value of this hands-on research experience to her professional development.

Bio from each panelist

The moderator is a cognitive psychologist and education researcher with Barry University's Adrian Dominican School of Education and an active member of the South Florida Education Research Alliance. Her areas of interest include community-based research and program evaluation as well as quasi-experimental, and mixed methods designs.

Panelist 1 joined the faculty in the Department of Counseling at Barry University in 2012. She currently collaborates with various community education agencies on research and evaluation projects such as Broward County Public School's Black Male Success Initiative and PROMISE Program and the Youth Environmental Alliance's Sailing for Success program.

Panelist 2, M.Ed., Supervisor of Family Court Services of the 11th Judicial Circuit, Florida, is a Florida Supreme Court Certified Family Mediator and has served as parenting coordinator since 1990. She is Past-President of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC), Past President of the Florida Chapter (FLAFCC).

Panelist 3 LCSW, graduated with a Masters in Social Work from Barry University in 1995. He has been the Coordinator of the Divorce program for Miami Dade College since 1996 and is the Director of the Outreach program for the Institute for Child and Family Health, Inc.

Panelist 4 is an Emeritus Distinguished Professor at The University of Akron where he taught graduate and postgraduate research courses. He is currently associated with Florida International University College of Education as a Visiting Scholar. He has written 17 books and chapters, over 150 refereed articles, and 300 refereed scholarly papers.

Panelist 5 began the Masters of Counseling program at Barry University in 2013. She is a member of Chi Sigma Iota, an international counseling honor society, and works as a Graduate Assistant for the Department of Counseling. She is very interested in assisting her community by collaborating on research projects such as the Sandcastles Program evaluation.