

Kids come first:

The challenges of Co-parenting after
separation or Divorce

Case study

RUBY

- 6 year old NA female brought in by dad
- Dad was reluctant to bring her in as he does not want meds
- Dad is an artist
- Mom is a SA and alcoholic who left the family and shows up erratically
- Dad still has feelings for her
- Ruby has an older brother
- Ruby has ASD
- Ruby is unruly in the classroom and is danger of being asked to leave her school
- Ruby's behavior deteriorates after mom "visits" and leaves

Don't go, dad

Statistics on Marriage/Divorce and Parenting for Native Americans

- Larger families (NA 3.57ppl/family; national avg. 3.2ppl/family)
- Higher birth rates (1/6th greater than general population)
- Higher birth rates among teens (50% greater than non-Native peers). Increased 12% between 2005 and 2007, more than twice the increase of any other racial/ethnic group
- Marriage ranked lower in importance in comparison to other race/ethnicities
- Higher share of births to a “never-married” mother (58.4% NA; 33.2% USA). 63% of births occurred outside of marriage (White, 25%; Hispanic, 48%; African American, 70%)
- Children twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Native counterparts (that is 1 in every 3 children)
- 39% currently married, 39% never married, 13% divorced (ACS, 2007)

Statistics on Marriage/Divorce and Parenting for Native Americans

- Divorce rate is higher than that for Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics
- 56% in interracial marriages
- Families with absent mother or father is 2 times the national average
- 6% of children cared for by grandparents (African American, 6%; Hispanic, 4.1%; White, 1.3%). In some tribes, up to 60% of children under 18 raised by grandparents.
- Higher rates of intimate partner violence, child abuse/neglect, substance abuse, violent crimes, and compulsive gambling

Unique Situations for Co-parenting in Native Families

- Intercultural marriages (across ethnicities and tribes)
 - Differences in cultural values, perceptions of parenting and expectations, communication styles, gender roles
- Living with in-laws or moving between parental houses
- Divorce or separation are not the only situations in which co-parenting occurs
 - Grandparents as co-parents
 - Aunts, uncles, later romantic partners
- Historical Experiences
 - Multigenerational traumas arising from specific histories of land loss, language loss, suppression/eradication of traditions/customs that supported healthy families
 - Boarding school and other forced family separation experiences

Unique Strengths for Maintaining Healthy Native Families

- Cultural sovereignty
- Native languages
- Traditional values across different Native communities emphasize:
 - Centrality of family and tribe
 - respect for children and elders
 - Spirituality
 - Harmony and balance

Unique Strengths for Maintaining Healthy Native Families

- Native cultural practices and traditions that celebrate marriage and family (e.g. traditional marriage, healing, and puberty ceremonies, traditional songs to greet family members, etc.)
- Extended family supports and involvement/bonding, including identification of other “parents” through kinship/clan systems
- Tribal elders to share historical strengths of Native American unions
- Collective approach to sharing wealth and resources

Take Home Messages

- Divorced families are still families
 - And need to be understood in family systems terms
- Relationships don't end with divorce
 - Parenting and co-parenting must be renegotiated
- The renegotiation “answer” is... the negotiation
 - Procedure not substance critical in the law (as in parenting)
 - Judges, custody evaluators don't have secret answers
 - But mediators, collaborative lawyers have helpful procedures...
- Emotions are biggest obstacle to renegotiating
 - We ask parents to do something emotionally *unnatural*

A Focus on Fathers

- Fathers are not replaceable family parts
 - Psychologically present even when physically absent
- Children benefit from father involvement
 - In more subtle ways...
- Big reason behind lower father contact is...
 - Not disregard for father's rights
 - Fathers' rights (or mothers' rights) is wrong focus
 - But conflict and grief

Forgive our fathers

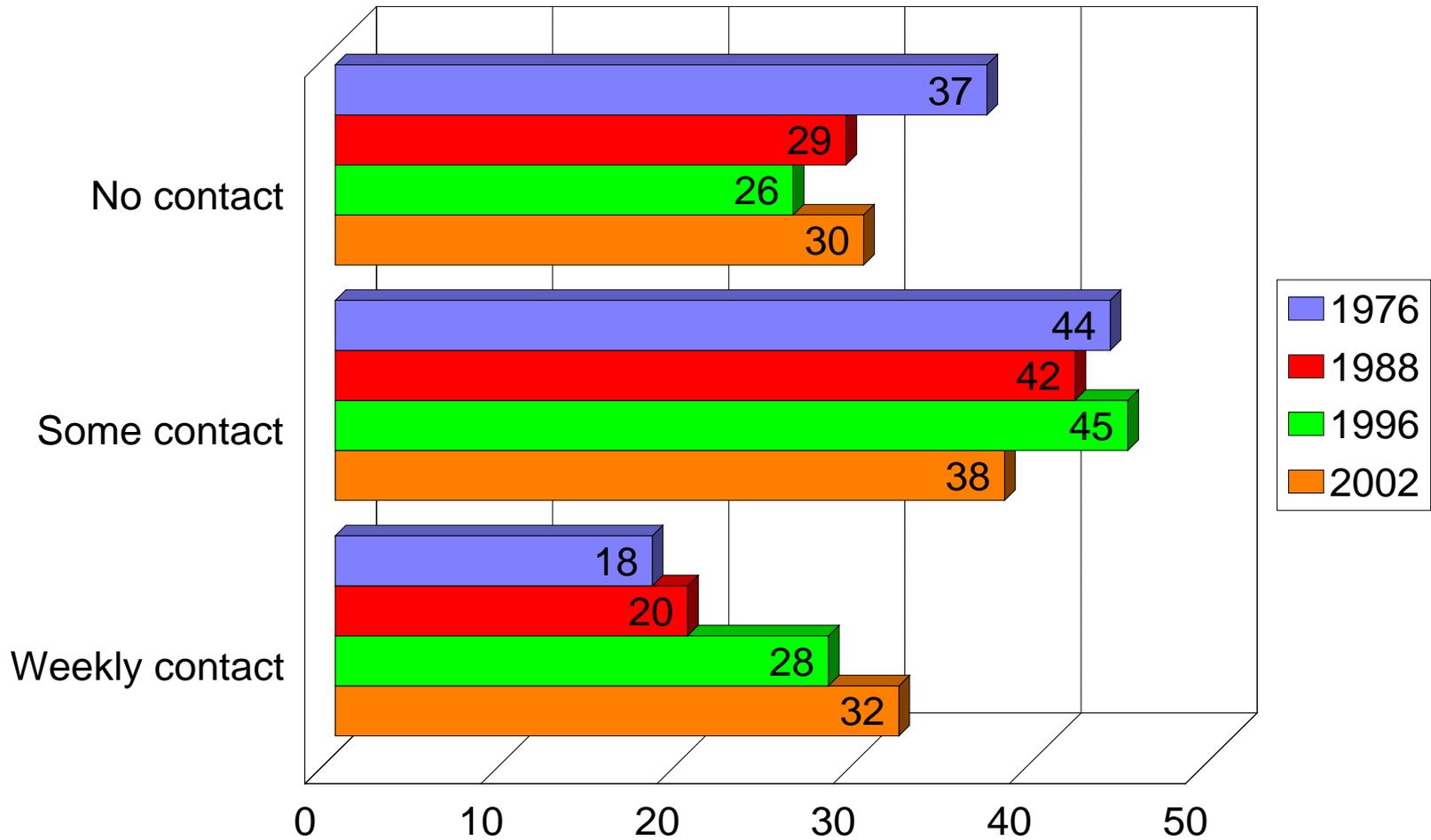
Is Fatherhood Changing?

- Primary custody (Grall, 2006; Meyer & Garasky, 1993)
 - 1960: Fathers = 10%
 - 2004: Fathers = 16.9%

Joint Physical Custody?

- National Center for Health Statistics (1995)
 - 16% of divorce agreements
 - But ??: 44% in Montana, 4% Nebraska
 - See Emery (1999)
- Lack of data is perhaps what's most shocking
- Amato and Emery, in progress

Nonresident Father-Child Contact



1976 = National Survey of Children (n = 367); 1988 = National Survey of Families and Households (n=636);
1996 = National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (n=950); 2002=National Survey of America's Families (n=3,270)

Changes in Father Involvement

- Weekly contact increasing significantly
- No significant change in dropouts
- Divorced Dads higher contact than never married Dads
- Far short of joint physical custody majority

Is Fatherhood changing?

Yes, but... Married Families

- Direct childcare in married families (Bianchi, 2000)
 - 1965: Fathers = .24 as much time as mothers
 - 1998: Fathers = .55 as much time as mothers
 - Aside: Approximation rule
 - 1/3 time with fathers = 120 overnights/year on average
- Trends:
 - Fathers much more involved
 - Mothers still do most direct parenting

Painful Beliefs About Childhood: Divorced versus Married



Aside: The Forest and the Trees

- The forest
 - Divorce increases all kinds of family stress
 - Divorce increases risk for psychological problems
 - Still, most children from divorced families are resilient
 - How parents parent *after* divorce promotes resilience
- The trees
 - There are some costs of coping
 - Pain is not pathology; grief is not a mental disorder
 - But pain and grief are significant psychologically

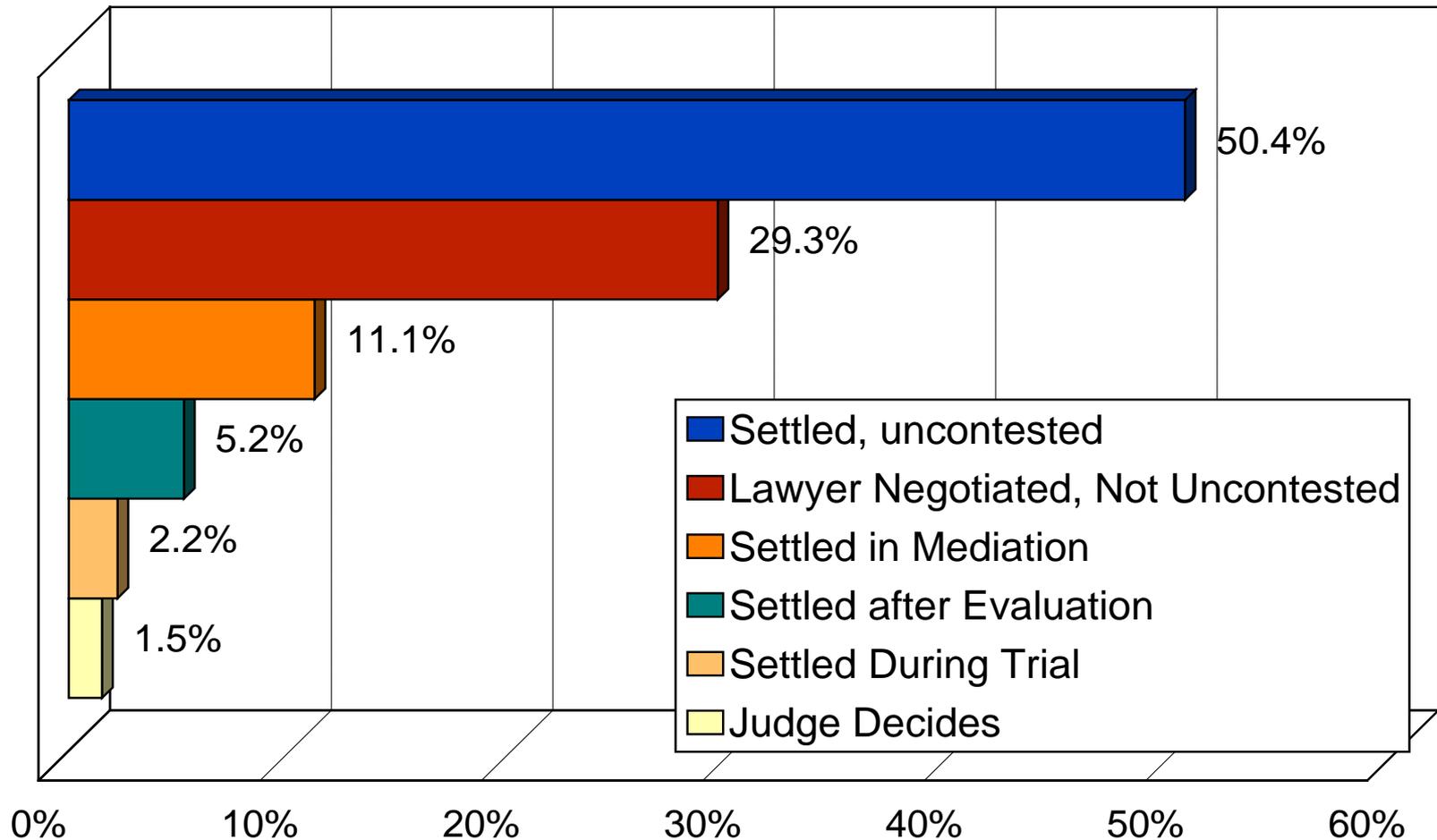
Process Matters

- In family life and in legal proceedings
- New methods of dispute resolution
 - Mediation – my focus
- More cooperative model of dispute resolution
 - But real power may be avoiding divisive legal battle
 - And giving fathers (and mothers) a voice

Mediation Isn't the Only Thing: A Hierarchy of Interventions in Divorce

- Negotiating at the kitchen table (pro se divorce)
- Divorce education
- **Mediation**
- Collaborative law
- Adversary attorney negotiations
- Custody evaluations (really a form of arbitration)
- Med/arb, arbitration, mini-trials
- Judicial decision making
- Parenting coordinators

Settlement Methods for 933 Custody and Visitation Issues in (Judge Edwards) Court



Based on Maccoby and Mnookin 1992

Why Bother to Try?

Kids Caught in Conflict

- Research shows conflict harms children in divorced (and married) families
- Nothing subtle about parents' conflict in divorce: A war zone
- *We professionals* are afraid to get in the middle
- But this is where children live
 - And unlike professionals, children have no choice

**July 12, 2006. Dr. Nicholas Bartha, 66,
blows up Manhattan townhouse after sending ex-wife email:**

“You will be transformed from a gold digger into an ash and rubble digger.”

Some Conflict and Anger is Normal and Inevitable

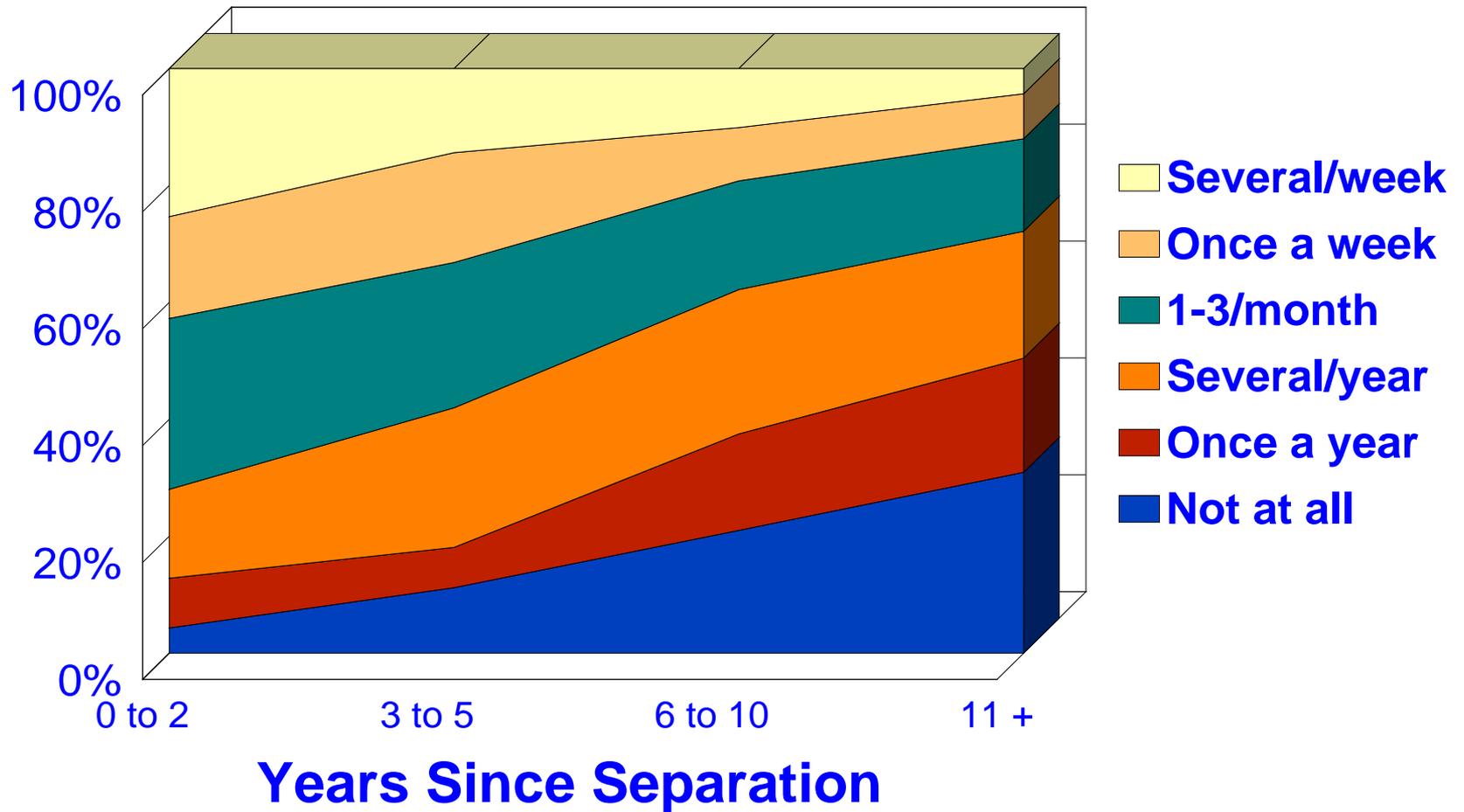
- If you can't be angry in middle of a divorce, when can you be?
- But much conflict and anger is emotional, not rational – Example?
Stubbing your toe
 - Hurt → anger
 - Guilt → anger
 - Love → anger
 - Fear → anger
 - Grief → anger

Everything burned up!

How Do People Usually Deal with Hurt and Grief of Lost Love?

- What you did in high school and college?
- Divorced parents often do the same thing...
 - But *really* divorcing your ex can mean divorcing your children too.

Father-Child Contact After Separation: By Length of Time Since Separation



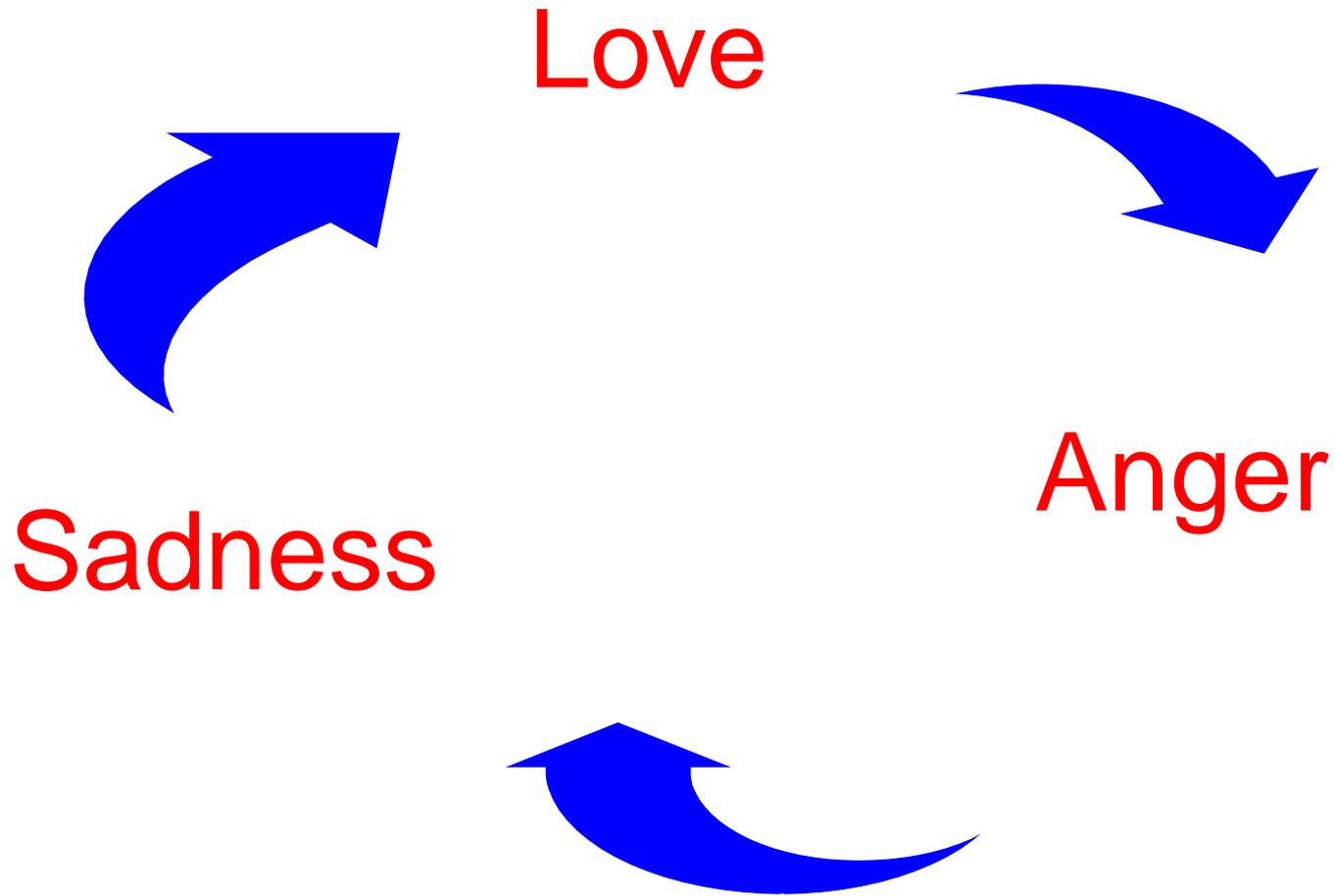
Grief: The Central Emotion

- Losses in divorce: Your marriage, maybe your children, your home, your savings, your friends, your role, your hopes and dreams
- Grief is a normal and healthy reaction to loss
- Kubler-Ross, Bowlby stages:
Denial, anger, bargaining,
depression, acceptance

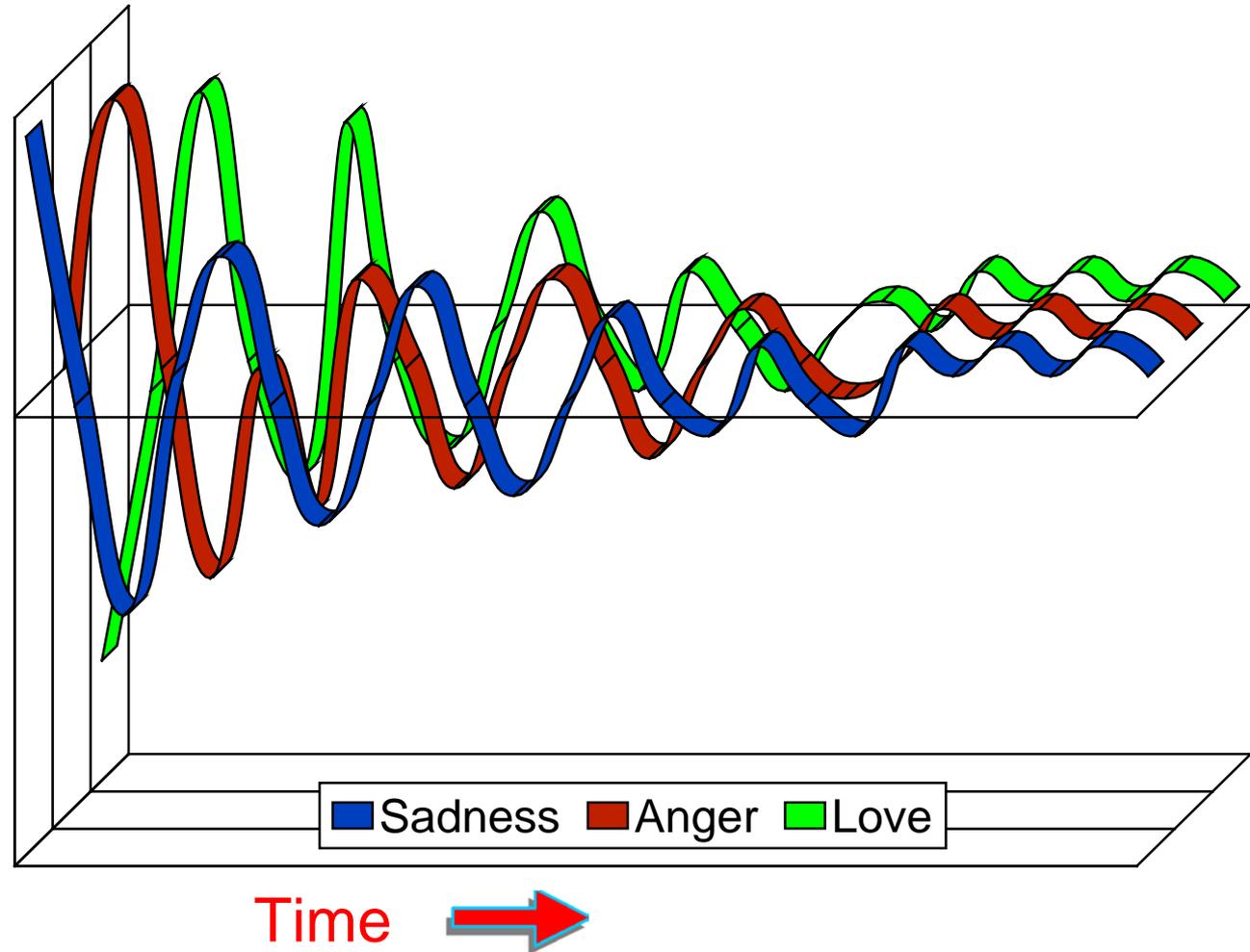
Problems with Grieving Divorce

- Unrecognized grief
- No one to grieve with: Your ex? Ha, ha. Your children. Hopefully not.
- Lose support of friends and families instead of garnering it (as happens following death)
- And the big issue: An uncertain loss, a potentially reconcilable one
- This makes grief different

A Theory of Grieving in Cycles Not Stages



Cycles of Love, Anger, and Sadness Become Less Intense and Come Into Phase Over Time



Grieving Alone

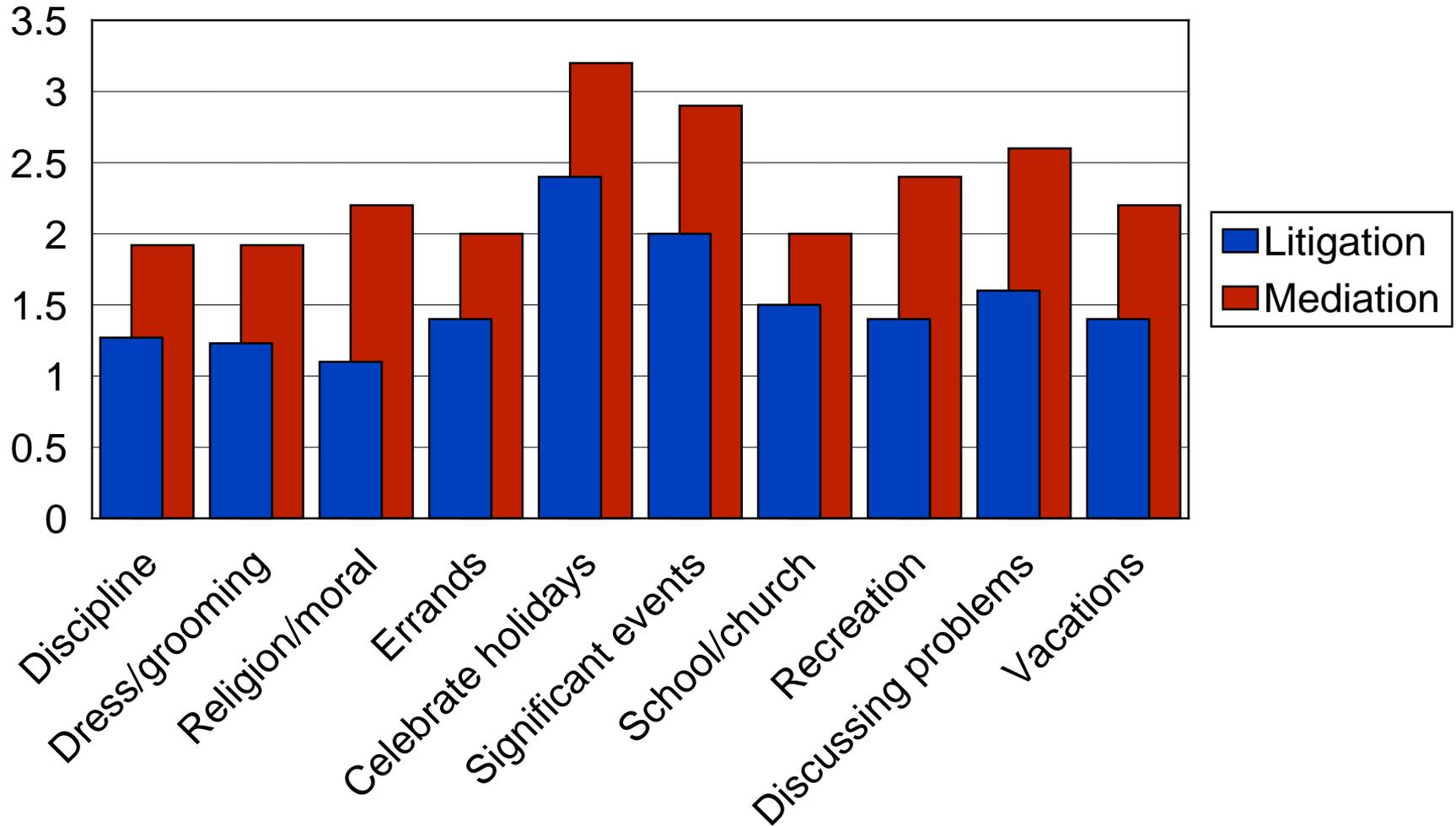
- Why doesn't he/she understand?
- How can she be so irrational?
- How can he be so cold?
- Different losses
 - His marriage died after a long chronic illness.
 - Her marriage was in a train wreck – and is still alive in the ER.
- The solution?

A Continuum of Relationships: Disengaging from Your Ex



Co-parenting

Nonresidential Parent-Child Involvement



Based on residential parent report

Take home message

- Divorced families need to be understood as family systems
- Relationships don't end with divorce, so they must be renegotiated
- The renegotiation answer is... the negotiation
- Emotions are biggest obstacle to renegotiating

A Native American Dream

This year was a rough year for the Redhouse family of Beclabito, New Mexico, in the Navajo Nation. Leo Redhouse, the father, served in Vietnam and worked twenty years in a power plant, but this year he fell off the wagon and has been in jail or on the streets drinking.

Rena Redhouse, the mother, had been sent to government boarding schools and recently survived cancer— but this year, she worries about how they'll make ends meet when it gets cold and they run out of coal to heat the house.

We follow Tye Redhouse, age 32, as he sells vacuums door-to-door in nearby racially-charged Farmington until gas prices force him to quit, and he sells his plasma for income.

Chantelle Redhouse, age 24, is trained as a chef but can't get a job at the local KFC.

But it isn't the racism or economy that is most on the minds of the Redhouses, it is how their family has been torn apart by addiction, divorce, and isolation.

In the short documentary "A Native American Dream," follow the Redhouses as a hard winter makes them question the validity of the American Dream, and spring brings a renewed sense of family and hope, as everyone (just barely) survives to start anew.

A Native American Dream Trailer

Resources

- Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way, M. Gary Neuman & Patricia Romanowski
- The Truth About Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions So You and Your Children Can Thrive, Robert E. Emery

Local & National Resources

- Native American Professional Parent Resources, Inc.:
www.NAPPR.org
- First Nations Community HealthSource: Navajo Healthy Marriage Opportunities Project: www.fnch.org
- National Indian Council on Aging, Inc., Helping Grandparents Raise Grandchildren across Indian Country Project:
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ana/grants/anagrants.html
- Native Pride Program in New Mexico, The Good Road of Life: Responsible Fatherhood Project: <http://www.nativeprideus.org/>
- New Mexico Alliance for Fathers and Families
- NM Young Fathers Project
- NM Teen Pregnancy Coalition

For More Information

- Laumann-Billings & Emery, (2000) *Journal of Family Psychology*. Pain study.
- Emery et al. (2001). *Journal of Consulting & Clinical*. Mediation study.
- Sbarra & Emery (2006). *Personal Relationships*. Grief study.
- D'Onofrio, B., Turkheimer, E., Emery, R., Slutske, W., Heath, A., Madden, P., & Martin, N. (2005). *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. Twin study.
- D' Onofrio, B., Turkheimer, E., Emery, R., Slutske, W., Heath, A., Madden, P., & Martin, N. (2006). *Developmental Psychology*. Twin Study.