

Discovering What Children Want to Tell Us: *A Child Centred Approach*

Skillful approaches to hearing children and youth



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AGENDA



- Seven Years Later - What happened?
- What is the Meeting with Children Approach (MWC)?
- Non-evaluative and non-tokenistic child involvement
- Meeting vs. Interviewing
- International Centre for Children and Family Law
- Virtual Meetings

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SEVEN YEARS LATER...

- Post Doctorate: Program Development - MWC
- Review of 7 jurisdictions - What are other countries doing to include children and how?
- Piloted MWC and now training internationally (Now MWC for Judges, and MWC for Child Protection)
- Meeting with Parents
- Research approval for AU, Canada and USA
- MWC in the Virtual Space



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Meeting with Children **SCALES**



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WHAT IS THE *MEETING WITH CHILDREN APPROACH*?




- Non Directive, Child Centred, Non Evaluative, Non Interpretive
- Follows a Standard Protocol
- Anchored by Child and Play Therapy Theory, Child Development, Child and Adult Attachment, Conflict Theory, and Self-Regulation Theory
- Inclusive of both parents
- Four play-based/projective activities
- Supported by four practitioner tools



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Children's Rights to Inclusion



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Meetings


Meetings adhere to Article 13 of the UNCRC...
 Children's rights to freedom of expression includes a right to impart information 'either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice'

Meetings adhere to Article 5 of the UNCRC...
 Article 5 gives children the right to receive guidance and direction from adults in the exercise of their Convention rights, including Article 12

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Meeting Vs. Interviewing



What is the difference?
 There is a philosophical and practical difference...

- Interviews involve a pre-determined (or in the moment) line of questioning
- Interviews rely on language, (words, sentence structure, logic, syntax, coherence)
- Interviews rely on answers to questions
- Interviews are comfortable for adults
- Interviews lead bias... no matter how open-ended the questions

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Meeting Vs. Re-enactment



Meeting through play

- Less Directive
- Less Conscious
- Provides protection and distance from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings
- Non Interpretative (uses the child's verbatim)

Play Re-enactment

- More Directive
- More Conscious
- Reduces distance from uncomfortable thoughts and feelings which can increase defenses

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Does this Mean- Don't Interview?



- Those *meeting* with children also need to be trained in how to construct questions for children
- Child development knowledge must be the foundation of any/all questions asked of a child/youth
- Interviewing a child is more than following a Child Interview protocol

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Interviews Can Greatly Increase Risk of Bias and Interpretation



Common Interview Headings... And.....

- Confidentiality
- General Interest
- Peers
- School
- Future
- Feeling States
- Self Esteem

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Following a Protocol Does Not Require Clinical Background

- Typical Day
- Understanding of Family Separation / Family Circumstances
- Parent/Child and Child/Sibling Relationships
- Extended Family Relationships
- Parenting
- Preferences

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Meetings...



Meetings are philosophically different to an interview...

- Effective listening also involves observation of the child in the process and *seeing* the products of children
- Effective listening and communicating of a child's views, feelings, interests, and needs requires training in understanding non-verbal cues and symbolic and metaphorical representations
- Meetings are a shared space without a specific interview agenda or interest in outcome

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Meetings Continued...



- ❑ Meetings require training in projective activities so that the most open invitation can be made without imposing a pre-determined outcome
- ❑ Meetings are not “random” conversations or going to a park with a child
- ❑ Meetings are child/youth friendly occurring in appropriate spaces. They are not a room with a few toys to lure a child into an interview process
- ❑ “Meetings” are structured with guidelines and protocols so that the most meaningful input can be gained. Meetings focus on *concerns originating with the child* (Yasenik & Graham, 2016 Meeting with Children).

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What is the *Meeting with Children Approach* about?



- ❑ The natural inclusion of children in family law ADR processes because they are already participants in their parents’ separation
- ❑ The parent view about the child’s needs, is not the same as the child’s concerns
- ❑ ADR sits in a post modern frame. It is not about there being one truth (ie mother’s belief or father’s belief); ADR allows for multiple truths. The child voice is just one other truth to be brought to the table

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WHAT IS NEW HERE?


Meeting with Children Approach is about...



- ❑ Getting out of the way of children to hear what their life is like, without the pressure of getting the specific answers that the family law system seeks
- ❑ Stepping outside of traditional interview strategies, and leaving room for the wandering narrative of the child
- ❑ It is a minimum of 2 meetings with children, and bringing messages back to parents
- ❑ The form and amount of feedback is determined from the parent readiness scale and the child and youth readiness scale
- ❑ The parent feedback is designed around 9 classifications, with feedback focusing on both child concerns and resilience factors

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Can Mediators, Parenting Coordinators, Children's Lawyers and Child Protection Workers Be Trained In a Non-Traditional Approach to Meeting with Children?

YES...
With *skills-based* training

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Guidelines for Child Inclusive Practice: Do They Exist?



- British Columbia (Canada) 30 hours training
- Alberta (Canada) 30 hours - 21 hours face to face and 10 hours of role play, post-course assignments
- Family Mediation Council (UK) 7 hour pre-course and 21 hours face-to-face child inclusive training and post-course assignments
- Scotland provisions for child inclusive practice

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Why Expressive and Projective Activities Are Important



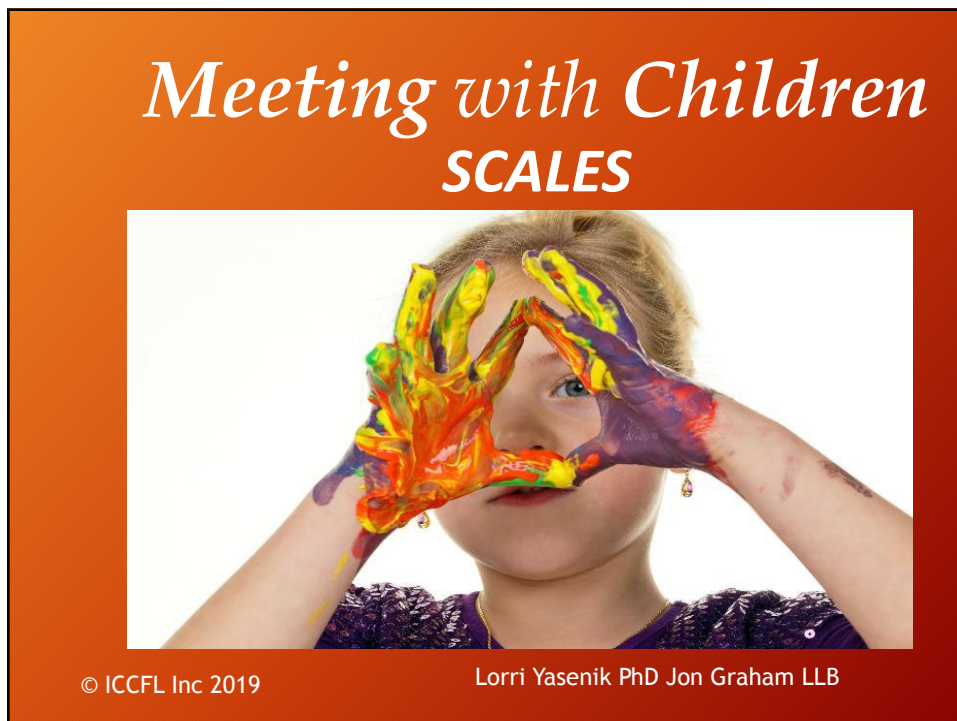
- Provide distance to decrease defensiveness
- Provide a way to enter a conversation
- Increase communication
- Adds the dimension of visuals in addition to language

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Temperament Scale



- Why is temperament important?
- 9 Variables of Temperament



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Parent Readiness Scale



Principles

- The scale is NOT intended as a process for making judgements about any one parent over the other; for diagnosing who would be the better parent.
- The Scale is a point in time device that describes how each parent is presenting in the family mediation process. It cannot indicate the future.
- The items are specifically chosen to represent the main factors that facilitate being able to hear from another person and in this case the child.

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Parenting Readiness Scale Items



The PRS is comprised of the 9 following scales:

1. Parent differentiation from child
2. Parent insight
3. Parent sensitivity
4. Level of disengagement
5. Parent ability to value role of other parent
6. Problem-solving ability
7. Parent ability to self-regulate
8. Parent ability to take a neutral stance re: other parent
9. Ability to place child's needs over parent needs

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Child/Youth Readiness Scale Items



1. Child's Verbal Ability to Express Self
2. Child's Development
3. Child's Level of Defensiveness
4. Child's Level of Differentiation from Parent Positions
5. Child's Role in Family
6. Child's Level of Distress
7. Child's Temperament
8. Child's Level of Understanding of the Process
9. Child's Level of External Support

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CHILD AND YOUTH READINESS SCALE



- ❑ The Child Readiness Scale is a 9 item 5-point scale for use for practitioners working with children of divorce ages 5-18 years of age.
- ❑ The scale is a non-standardized tool intended to assist practitioners who meet with children to identify a child's potential readiness to provide direct or indirect input to their parents.
- ❑ The scale is designed to identify ratings from low to high. Higher overall ratings may indicate a child's capacity and increased degree of ability to provide his/her voice in more direct ways with his/her parents.
- ❑ Low scores may indicate a lack of capacity, ability or interest in providing direct levels of input and practitioner caution is advised.

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Child and Youth Concerns Scale



CYCS

- ❑ Tool for Child Specialists
- ❑ Assists ADR Specialists to manage and collect feedback provided by Child Specialist (provides categories)
- ❑ 8 main areas of concern noted by children of post separation and divorce are included
- ❑ Assists parents to create parenting plans that are child sensitive – putting the pieces together with child input

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Areas of Importance to Children



1. Time
2. Physical space
3. Emotional space
4. Psychological Space
5. Understanding parents' separation
6. Family Relationships
7. Peer Supports
8. Community Support
9. Other



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Meeting with Children Approaches



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Considerations Meeting with Children for Virtual Meetings



- Meeting with Children can occur in-room and online.
- Working with Parents: Parent Readiness and Parent Feedback
- Practice Using the PRS
- Increasing Readiness
- Preparing Feedback after meeting children
- Practice Using the Child and Youth Concerns Scale to Provide Feedback
- Decision-making related to Feedback
- Role Plays and Video Examples

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In-Room Approaches

1. Parent preparation
Child preparation
Practitioner preparation
2. Practitioner room is prepared for the meetings
3. Two sessions.
Parent 1 brings child once
Parent 2 brings child once
4. Two exercises per session
Play based exercises
5. Non interpretative: Capture of child verbatim
6. Feedback approved by child



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Virtual Meetings Approaches

1. Parent preparation
Child preparation
Practitioner preparation
2. Creation of a private space for the child meetings
3. Two sessions
Parent 1 house, Parent 2 house
4. Two exercises per session
Play based exercises
5. Non interpretative: Capture of child verbatim
6. Feedback approved by child



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Considerations for Virtual Meetings




- Practitioner Competence in the use of Tele Services and in Meeting with Children
- Suitability: Children should be older than 8 years and able to safely manage themselves remotely, parent readiness is high enough to maintain boundaries
- Informed Parent Consent and Child Assent
- Written briefing for parents and caregivers and preparation meeting online
- Strategy for managing products of the session
- Solid planning of the online meeting
- Ethical practice

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PARENT FEEDBACK

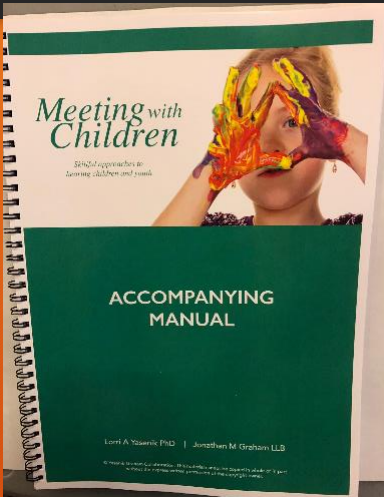
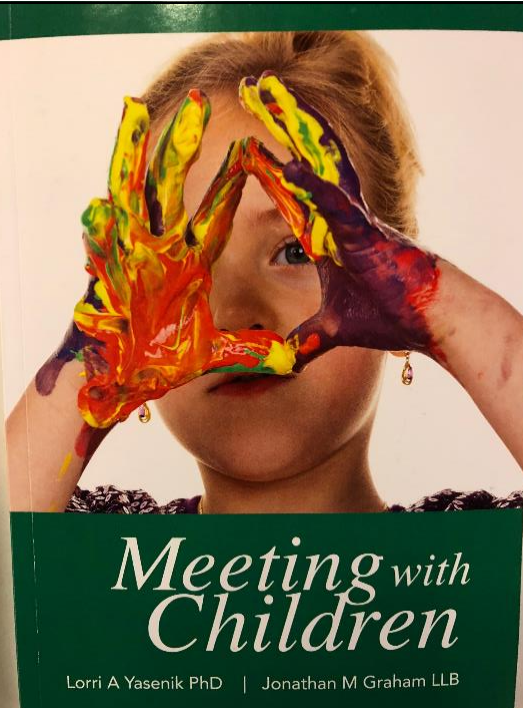


- Can be in-room or online / parents together or separated
- Working with Parents: Parent Readiness and Parent Feedback
- Practice Using the PRS
- Increasing Readiness
- Preparing Feedback after meeting children
- Practice Using the Child and Youth Concerns Scale to Provide Feedback
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MWC Course

Meeting with Children
A practical approach to learning children and youth

ACCOMPANYING MANUAL

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WHAT IS THE MEETING WITH CHILDREN APPROACH Training?



- Follows a Standard Protocol
- 4-day skills-based course for those who wish to be child inclusive (28 hours face to face 12 hours post-course)
- Includes access to online child development materials
- Teaches 6 activities for use with children from 5 to 18 years
- Teaches 4 practitioner tools
- Accompanied by a book, practitioner's manual and online resources
- MWC meets the requirements to be a Child Inclusive Practitioner in Canada, UK and Australia

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QUESTIONS



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