

Teens of the divorced often left to cope alone

By GLORIA NEWMAN SLIMAK

Divorced couples often get emotional support from close friends or counselors. And their young children receive extra hugs and care from concerned relatives and teachers.

But teen-agers are often left to cope alone during the crisis of their parents' divorce.

Marjorie Potter, counselor and divorced mother of two teen-age daughters, believes this shouldn't happen. For studies show that "younger kids adjust easier, older kids have a harder time," said the coordinator of many adult divorce workshops at Oakland University's Continuum Center.

Her concern, coupled with strong interest from area high school counselors, led to the recent Saturday workshop "When Your Parents Get Divorced."

One of many personal growth and career programs offered by the Continuum Center, the new workshop brought together 15 teens from local schools.

Dressed casually, but looking nervous, they came to "give support" and to "share with others" about a topic they don't often talk about, said Mrs. Potter.

Through discussions in an informal setting, the workshop participants were given coping strategies to deal with their own situations.

"WE CAN'T save you from the pain, but we can provide support and clarity what's going on," encouraged Mrs. Potter, who has a private practice in Birmingham. One also is a counselor with the Displaced Homemaker Project at Macomb County Community College.

As the workshop progressed, the teenagers relaxed. There was less looking at the floor, more direct eye contact, smiles and frequent comments tossed back and forth.

The workshop "relieved the pressure of feeling isolated," explained Mrs. Potter, a Troy resident.

The counselor likened the teen years, often characterized by emotional highs and lows, to being in a revolving restaurant. The adolescent stands precariously with one foot forward on the turning floor, which represents imbalance. He holds the other foot back

on the immovable floor, which represents home.

"But what happens when there is no stable place?" she asked. "It is especially hard for teen-agers who are trying to learn to grow up, as well as grow away from home, while their home life has drastically changed because of their parents' divorce."

THE FACT that one out of three marriages ends in divorce doesn't lessen a teen's feelings of being different when his parents separate.

Our society often equates success with marriage and perpetuates the stereotypes of the "perfect" two-parent family, Mrs. Potter explained.

The workshop participants, who included Mrs. Potter's own 16-year-old daughter Karin, were asked not to "tell their story" instead, they were urged to ask relevant questions, deal with their feelings and offer suggestions to one another.

Evie Shafer, a Continuum Center coordinator who assisted Mrs. Potter at the workshop, was impressed that the teens "were so open." Their questions, dealing with legal issues, how to spend holidays and how to communicate when strong emotions arise, reflected concern and love for both parents, said Mrs. Shafer.

The workshop leaders advised the teens that being aware of the emotional stages many people experience while going through a divorce can help them understand themselves and their parents better.

Recognizing the stages can help them realize that "this is normal for this situation," said Mrs. Potter.

The seven stages — dislocation, erosion, detachment, physical separation, mourning, second adolescence and hard work — are guides rather than rigid absolutes.

BOTH PARENTS may not experience the stages in the same order or at the same time. There isn't necessarily progression, but instead there may be some reverting back and forth. "You can be in four different stages all in the same day," Mrs. Potter added.

Not only do the parents experience these stages, but so do children — and some relatives — to a lesser degree.

During this transitional period in a teen's life, various emotions can sur-

face. Anger is one of the strongest and therefore often the scariest and most difficult for a teenager to handle.

The anger may be directed at one or both parents, who couldn't "stay in love" or at the adolescent himself, who unrealistically thinks he could have prevented the divorce.

"Every child of a divorced family has a fantasy that his parents will get together if . . ." said Mrs. Potter.

To find effective ways to channel this anger, Mrs. Potter held a mini "brainstorming" session during the workshop. The teen-agers' ideas, quickly written on the blackboard, resulted in a long list of helpful suggestions — from writing about the anger to throwing darts.

SINCE ANGER can often make a teen respond aggressively toward his

parents, the workshop leaders demonstrated assertive communication.

While the teens practiced in pairs, they learned that to be assertive means being emotionally honest and direct, yet showing respect for oneself and others. "It is a less calculated way to express oneself," said Mrs. Shafer.

The word "helpful" best described the teen-agers' feelings about the all-day workshop, which cost \$15.

Nineteen-year-old Kathy Weber of Warren came because her younger sister "needed to talk and get it out." But she found the workshop "fantastic."

The workshop "gave kids our age a chance to get together and talk. We wouldn't do that with other kids who we didn't have this (divorce) in common with," added Kelli Chudler, 15, of Southfield.

Offering borscht with the Beethoven



MISHA RACHLEVSKY

Classical music and classic cooking are among the good things of life for which an appetite must be created.

Misha Rachlevsky, already encoined as a musical missionary zealous enough to convert most souls willing to listen, will now try to win hearts through the stomach.

As Impassario of Renaissance Concerts, which brings Nightcap Concerts and Concerts A La Mode, Rachlevsky has always been willing to go a little further.

Concerts A La Carte offer a multicourse gourmet dinner at Twenny's Cafe, with concert music served up between the entree and dessert and coffee.

Another Rachlevsky innovation were the Solisti Barochi concerts which were held in Southfield but are no longer being offered.

Nightcap with Mozart Chamber Music Concerts are held each Friday night from 11 p.m. at the Birmingham Unitarian Church in Bloomfield Hills.

In addition to good music, good fellowship, hot cider and wine are offered at an hour when most folks are winding up the evening. But that's not all.

WHETHER Glogg contests, fireworks on the Fourth of July, birthdays for Mozart in period costumes or "Star Wars" in music, complete with hand-held laser light show for Halloween, Rachlevsky always tries to leave them laughing (and coming back for more).

"Well, last December in the spirit of the holidays I cooked 200 portions of hot Russian Borscht for one Nightcap Concert," Rachlevsky recalled.

"Woe to us, the weather was terrible and only 70 people showed up," he said.

"But those who were there didn't miss the others at all. They ate every portion of borscht and not a drop was left."

Friday night (Dec.19) Rachlevsky will again serve borscht.

And this isn't warmed-over soup from the supermarket shelves. Fear not. This is borscht made from the recipe of Misha Rachlevsky's mother — with meat, vegetables, beets.

"And it has to stay at least a day for the flavor to mellow," he said.

THE BORSCHT will be served following a chamber-music offering by a string quartet of Rachlevsky on violin, Linden Snedden-Smith on violin, Paul Silver on viola and David Saltzman on cello.

All are members of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

The concerts are preceded by 30 minutes of social time with wine and other beverages served. Tickets are \$5 for concert and the afterglow. Students are charged \$3.

And if borscht isn't enough, Renaissance Concerts' very first benefit will be a New Year's Eve Party from 10:30 p.m. on at iBrowse Bookstore, 33086 Northwestern Highway.

"Great food, wine, drinks, music, dancing and even door prizes are offered," he said. "It's going to be an unforgettable evening of music and surprises all for \$12.50 per person."

Tickets are available at iBrowse Bookstore or by calling 851-8934.

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