

REVIEW of RESOURCE*Two worlds: When relationships end and parents separate (2013)*

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This newly-published card set made up of 48 images has been developed by St Luke's Innovative Resources in partnership with the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. The cards are illustrated by Carolyn Marrone whose work has featured previously in the Innovative Resources stable of publications and once again she has produced a number of evocative images. *Two Worlds* is a timely resource. We are working with an unprecedented number of children and young people whose lives have been disrupted by parental separation, by being placed in out-of-home care and due to migration. In almost every field of human services practice, from education, housing and income support services to specialist therapeutic programmes, there are children struggling with the impacts of disrupted home lives and a sense of loss of a 'world'.

The findings of research studies suggest that children are negatively affected by frequent moving between separated parents (Hyams, 2010), with this being particularly so when children are in their pre-school years and parents continue to be in conflict or are themselves experiencing debilitating disruption to their lives (Fehlberg, Smyth, Maclean, & Roberts, 2011). Equally, children from chaotic households who are placed in care are subject to the complexities of separation from parents, access arrangements and the adjustment to a new world. We need to be alarmed that 'the crucial early years of childhood are compromised by last resort removal and unstable living arrangements' (Sammut, 2011) and subsequent instability of placements. This results in a large cohort of children and young people who have high needs and require skilled intervention.

With separation and divorce an issue of international concern, studies have also been undertaken to investigate health outcomes for children from families in which conflict has occurred. The results suggest that children subject to parental conflict and distressing living environments have poorer physical health outcomes than their peers from stable households (Fabricius, & Luecken, 2007), and children are likely to have higher anxiety and poorer mental health outcomes when exposed to the conflict and uncertainties associated with separation and divorce (McIntosh, & Chisholm,

2008). *Two Worlds* acknowledges the challenges faced by all parties involved in such circumstances and, while the emphasis might be on children and young people, this card set is equally able to stimulate conversations with adults and encourage them to see issues through the eyes of children. Being able to talk about experiences and emotions is crucial and these images provide opportunities for tackling such challenges and understanding the impacts on children who are often unable to use language to explain their experience of their worlds.

The notes provided with this card set state that 'Each card has the potential to mean something different to each person' (p. 7) and this is, indeed, the case. The illustrations elicit an array of ideas and responses that encompass the full range of feelings and reactions people might have to change in their worlds. I was particularly taken with the image of the clean, well-ordered kitchen, which made my mind race across a variety of interpretations and feelings a child might have in response to the picture. Was this a strange kitchen in which I could never belong? Was this a kitchen tidied and ready for the sale of my home? Was this the kitchen used by my non-resident parent who hardly ever cooked? Or was this an indication of my parent coping so much better than previously — a kitchen that 'the welfare' might approve





of? Equally powerful are the images of the road stretching into the distance, the 'busy' calendar and the clock. When working with children whose parents have separated, many of us hear children talk of waiting for a parent to collect them for contact visits, feeling overwhelmed by all the things to be fitted into the week because their time is shared between households, and having to travel long distances between their parents' locations.

One of the real benefits of this card set is the multiple meanings that can be drawn from the illustrations as the cards do not carry text that might influence children and young people to think in particular ways. As outlined in the companion booklet, this was a deliberate choice and one that will pay dividends, I think. And, as always with St Luke's Innovative Resources products, careful thought has been given to the context in which both clients and practitioners might be using the resource. There are sections encouraging human service workers to think through how and why they might use the card set before embarking on work with a client; and there are also sections on how to: 'get the cards into the hands of participants'; ideas about how the cards might be used appropriately and creatively; who might benefit from having access to conversations about the cards, and a range of potential questions of participants to get started with when using the cards. At the conclusion of the booklet other resources — books and articles — are suggested for human service workers, and for parents and families. Young people often find reading about the experience of others in similar situations cathartic, as do adults, and there is a range of books available that human service workers and parents can access as part of the process of helping children and young people through adaptations to their changing worlds.

Two Worlds is an essential resource to have to hand in family support, out-of-home care and family relationship centres. It contributes to the now impressive library of tools published by Innovative Resources and exported worldwide — and might even come to rival their best-selling *Strength Cards* in its applications.

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