

(Excerpted from team parenting sessions of Fatherhood Development: A Curriculum for Young Fathers; COPYRIGHT, NPCL, 2000)¹

YOUR CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE: THE IALAC STORY

PURPOSE:

To demonstrate the impact of parental conflict on children. To increase participants' motivation to work cooperatively with their child's mother and other team members. To introduce a list of rights and responsibilities for unmarried parents raising children cooperatively.

MATERIALS:

Leader Resource, "The IALAC Story"
Handout: "The Family Bill of Rights"
Two large sheets of brightly colored paper

PLANNING NOTES:

Write the word IALAC in large letters on each sheet of paper. Tear several big pieces off one of the sheets.

Make extra copies of the handout. After the session, the fathers may want to take an extra copy of the Family Bill of Rights to share with their child(ren)'s mother.

PROCEDURE

1. Tell the men that you will end this session with an activity to help them think about team parenting from their children's perspective. Tell the group that you want to read them a story that will dramatize the impact that parents' conflict can have on their children's self esteem. Explain that you've made the story rather exaggerated to make a point.
2. Hold up the intact IALAC sign. Read the story from the leader resource. Be dramatic with your reading, taking time to rip off a piece of the sign each time you see the word "rip" on the leader resource. You should just have a small piece of the sign at the end of the reading.

¹ For more information on the Fatherhood Development curriculum, contact the National Partnership for Community Leadership (NPCL) at www.npcl.org

3. At the end of the reading hold up the second sign with the pieces torn off. Say, "When Andre was all grown up, his IALAC sign had done a lot of mending. Young people are very resilient. BUT there were some pieces that were gone FOREVER.
4. After the reading ask the following questions:
 - What did you think of the IALAC story?
 - What was the point for you?
 - What kinds of situations occur between you and your child's mother that might cause your child's IALAC sign to crack?
 - What could you and your child's mother do to help your child feel more loveable and capable?
5. Now distribute the handout, the Family Bill of Rights. Explain that these rights apply to parents who live separately but want to raise their children cooperatively. Ask for a volunteer to read it or read it yourself aloud to the group. Get reactions from the group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think about the IALAC story and the Bill of Rights?
2. What fits for your life? What impact will any of this have on your relationship with your child's mother? On your relationship with your child?

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LEADER RESOURCE for activity

IALAC STORY

This is a story about Andre and one his most prized possessions – his IALAC sign. When Andre was born, he was just like the rest of us. He came equipped with a sign called IALAC. IALAC stands for “I am Loveable and Capable.

Because it was invisible, no one – not his parents, relatives, or the doctor who delivered him knew it was there. Nevertheless, it was shiny and new and in the earliest days of Andre’s life when his young mother and father (who were happy and in love) stroked him, kissed him and admired him, his IALAC sign actually grew a little bit larger and stronger every day.

The IALAC sign is an indication that children come into this world free of self doubt, feelings of shame, inferiority or anything negative. They must learn those things from the people and the world around them. And so it began for Andre:

At age three, Andre, his mom and dad did a lot of things together. They had fun on the playground and watched cartoons on Saturdays. One day at the playground he heard his mom and dad yelling at each other. Andre felt scared. He went over to give his dad a hug and his father pushed him away and told him to go back to the swings. His father’s face looked so mean that Andre started to cry. His mom came over and hugged him but Andre still felt scared. (RIP) A very small piece of Andre’s IALAC sign fell off. Andre didn’t feel so loveable and capable at that moment.

When Andre was almost four, he overheard his mother, Mika, and his grandmother, Sarah, talking about his father. His grandmother said, “That man ain’t no good. He doesn’t ever have any money. He can’t even buy medicine when the boy is sick. You don’t need that no good dog.” Andre didn’t understand exactly what his grandmother meant, but he could tell by her voice that she was mad at his daddy and that made Andre feel sad. Another piece of his IALAC sign broke off because Andre wanted his mom and grandmother to love his daddy like he did. (RIP)

On his fourth birthday, Andre heard his father at the door. He went running to the door, but his mother was there looking very mad. She and his daddy started to yell at each other. His mom said, “Where’s the money you promised. I don’t want to see that stupid toy you bought for his birthday. He needs clothes and food.” Andre covered his ears and started back into his room. But not before he heard his father say, “You bitch. You can’t keep me away from my son. I hate you.” (RIP)

A few months later, Andre was visiting his father. They went to see a Disney movie. It was a good day with his dad. Then they went to a lady named Miss Kim's house for dinner. Andre didn't like the way that Miss Kim hugged and kissed his daddy. Andre told Miss Kim that her macaroni and cheese didn't taste as good as his mommy's. Miss Kim got mad and called his mommy a bad name. Andre's dad told him to eat and tell Miss Kim that her food was good. Andre told his dad that he wanted to go home to his mommy and his dad got real mad. It wasn't a good day anymore. (RIP)

A year later Andre started kindergarten. His mom called him her little man. He was growing up fast. She said, "Your daddy doesn't come over to see you like he should. He's no good. I know when you grow up, you will never be like him." Andre felt confused. He still loved his dad and wanted to spend time with him. Sometimes he thinks that his dad doesn't visit a lot because his mother and grandmother are so mean to him. Andre worries that they are driving him away. A week later his father called. Andre said, "Dad please come get me. I want to go with you." His dad promised he would come. Andre took his bath and got dressed. He waited and waited, but his dad never came. Andre kept waiting. Finally, his mom told him his dad wasn't coming. She asked if he wanted spaghetti, his favorite, for dinner. Andre said he wasn't hungry. His stomach hurt and his heart did too. (RIP)

When Andre was in second grade, he had gotten kind of used to not seeing his father much. It was no big deal. He started getting into trouble a lot at school. His teacher said he had a behavior problem. Nowadays his mother was always tired when she got home from work. She never laughed much anymore. Today after school his mom was screaming mad. She said the school called her at work and said they were expelling him for calling a little girl a bitch. Andre's mom yelled at him. "What do you know about calling somebody a bitch. This is awful. I don't know who you are. You are just like your no-good daddy. You're gonna grow up and break somebody's heart just like he broke mine. I can't take this anymore." Andre just stood there and acted like he didn't care. He had learned that this was the best way to deal with his mother when she started screaming. But inside he wondered, "Was his daddy no good? Does his daddy love him? Was he just like his dad?" A big piece of his IALAC sign cracked and fell off. (Final RIP)

At the end of the reading hold up the second sign with the pieces torn off. Say, "When Andre was all grown up, his IALAC sign had done a lot of mending. Young people are very resilient. BUT there were some pieces that were gone FOREVER.

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Handout

THE FAMILY BILL OF RIGHTS*

1. Every child has the right to have two homes where he or she is cherished and given the opportunity to develop normally.
2. Every child has the right to a meaningful, nurturing relationship with each parent.
3. Every parent and child has the right to call themselves a family regardless of how the children's time is divided.
4. Every parent has the responsibility and right to contribute to the raising of his or her child.
5. Every child has the right to have competent parents and to be free from hearing, observing, or being part of their parents' arguments or problems with one another.
6. Every parent has the right to his or her own private life and territory and to raise the children without unreasonable interference from the other parent.

**From Mom's House, Dad's House: A Complete Guide for Parents Who Are Separated, Divorced, or Remarried by Isolina Ricci, PhD, page 11, Simon and Schuster, 2nd edition, 1997.*