

## THE INFLUENCE OF THE FOCUSING METHOD ON THE PROCESS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE

Mor Gimani Oshri

South-West University “Neofit Rilski” – Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, [Morazon10@gmail.com](mailto:Morazon10@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The aim of this research is to conduct a theoretical analysis between a field that deals with the topic of divorce and its effects on the family during the process, and a research field that deals with the Focusing method. In this study, I analyze and compare these two fields in order to examine their connection and the direct influence of the Focusing method on the divorce process, which is considered in itself a challenging and turbulent experience. The Focusing method offers an alternative approach that supports a more beneficial and precise family process for the family members.

The materials I use in this article are theoretical materials on the topic of divorce and its far-reaching effects on the family. In addition, I use theoretical materials on the Focusing method and its far-reaching effects on the human soul. The methodology of the article is a theoretical analysis that seeks to connect these two types of materials.

In the research findings, I discovered that, aside from the fact that the Focusing process itself supports problem-solving and coping with crises, there is a significant gap between treatments that succeed with the process and those that do not. The research field of the method, combined with the research field on divorce processes and their effects, has not been extensively studied. However, observations from patient treatment processes show that successful clients pause for a moment, and from this pause a felt sense emerges. What happens during this moment of pause turns out to be a novel key factor in resolving deep psychological crises, such as those experienced during divorce. This is because it is not merely about connecting with a past emotion, memory, or thought, not only with a physical sensation; rather, it is a comprehensive, living process that brings about change through an adaptive organismic process capable of understanding the problem as a whole. The results of my theoretical research indicate that the combination of these two theoretical fields has not been specifically studied with regard to the topic of divorce and its consequences, but it has been observed in clinical treatment processes and numerous success stories, with far-reaching effects on the individual's entire environment.

In the conclusions of this theoretical research, I find a necessary connection between the two fields: the emotional field, which encompasses the complexities and challenges within the family divorce process and all its consequences, and the spiritual field of genuine personal development through the Focusing method, a unique process of attention that supports therapeutic change. The connection between these two research fields represents a new, underexplored alternative and constitutes a breakthrough for the entire family context, promoting more beneficial family relationships. Based on the theoretical analysis I conducted, my recommendation is to continue examining the integration of these two theoretical fields in future empirical research. I suggest incorporating the Focusing method into family communication, particularly within the context of therapy for divorce processes. The Focusing method can influence a person's inner world and transform their entire perspective on life. The method involves a significant layer of authentic self-reflection, which does not allow escape into places of frustration or fear and “forces” one to confront wounds or pains that manifest in the present reality and even affect the surrounding environment and family context. Through the Focusing method, it is possible to heal these wounds and move forward on a compelling path, where the greatest beneficiaries are the individual and their family members.

**Keywords:** Focusing method, Parental divorce, Personal development

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The field I focus on in my research is parental divorce and the profound impact the divorce process has on children. As part of my exploration of divorce and family dynamics, I also investigate a fascinating field that deals with the Focusing method and the theoretical connection between these two domains. I believe that the tools and coping methods available today are not sufficient to truly create a supportive environment after such a loss. Therefore, integrating these two fields can offer significant insights and excellent tools through which family members can benefit and emerge stronger from the crisis. In this paper I examine whether there is a theoretical connection between these two research fields and whether I can propose a new spiritual-practical alternative that could create a healthier, more supportive family environment for all parties involved in the family process. The reader accompanies me on a fascinating and in-depth investigative journey between these two domains. At the beginning of the paper I theoretically review the first field, which deals with the parental divorce process and its impact on children. I then provide a theoretical review of the research field that studies the Focusing method — what the method is, its many advantages, and the novel contribution it brings. Finally, I conduct an in-depth theoretical

integration of the two fields, seeking points of intersection between them, and I demonstrate how the Focusing method can assist in coping with family crises, help families get through them, and generate a positive, beneficial influence on the entire divorce process — from the individual to the family and the wider environment.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials I use in this article are theoretical materials on the topic of parental divorce and its far-reaching effects on the family. These materials will include articles and books on the subject, and interesting studies that can shed light on such a significant family-related issue. The materials in the study delved into the divorce process and the accompanying family difficulties. In addition, they examined the critical effects on children in various areas, such as emotional, social, and more. In addition, I use theoretical materials on the Focusing method and its far-reaching effects on the human soul. Focusing it is a way of understanding and facilitating what some human beings naturally do and all have the capacity to do when up against the need for change. They pay attention to an unclear, but bodily-sensed aspect of how they are in a situation. They attend to what we call a “bodily felt sense of” a situation or problem. And thus, a new dimension of the experience is revealed, bringing with it a physical response such as a release of tension or tears. A process of this kind becomes a driving force in the therapeutic journey (Hendricks, 2001) And gradually, a process of deep inward reflection develops, which helps in resolving crises. The methodology of the article is a theoretical analysis that seeks to connect these two types of materials.

### Materials on Parental Divorce

In general, we can note that the divorce proceeding constitutes one of the dramatic and meaningful events, both in the life of the individual and in the lives of those near to him. According to Rabin (2010), this is an unplanned event, which entails tension, clash of desires, confusion, loss, stigma, and pressure. This process, from its development and many years after its end, constitutes a significant harm to the processes of adaptation, which the individual develops during his life (Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2004). While people tend to plan their way of life, through making conscious decisions and from personal and free initiative, the contextual effect of the divorce proceeding can be expressed in the real harm, both to the individual’s self-image and to his confidence and independence (Thomas & Ryan, 2008). Consequently, a couple that has experienced divorce in essence is exposed to changing expressions of pressure, stress, and anxiety (Amato, 2010). Moreover, this experience is often accompanied by anger, self-accusation, loneliness, and sense of powerlessness (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). In addition, divorce is a phenomenon with many traumatic implications on those involved in it, short and long term. According to the arguments of Amato (2010), this is a continuous process, which supposedly can change the patterns of social adjustment and interpersonal interaction, both among the partners and among the family members, which for them the legal proceeding provides a full range of stressors (Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2004; Rabin, 2010). One of these factors is a feeling of harm from the separation, which is also a process of dissolution, which disrupts family harmony, and as an expression of hatred, leads to negative consequences and traumas (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). According to Thomas and Ryan (2008), separation and change in the lifestyle, which derives as a natural result of the effect on the family life, can challenge the individual’s adjustment to the social life, in the general sense, and influence the process of his socialization. Therefore, as of now, it is accepted to perceive the phenomenon of divorce in its social-psychological meaning and to research its causes and implications, specifically from the perspective of the social adjustment (see for example Rabin, 2010). This viewpoint caused the researchers, in recent years, to turn to the topic of the impact of the divorce proceeding, not only on the couple but also on their relatives and first and foremost their children. Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon (2004) note that children who are exposed to a conflict between their parents and are aware of the development of the divorce proceeding will need to deal with the understanding of this traumatic event and to adjust in the future to its implications. According to DeGarmo and Kitson (1996), the divorce proceeding can harm the abilities of all those involved in it to adjust to normative life in society. According to their definition, the process of adjustment assumes the building of the individual’s life, subject to a number of themes that guide life in society. In the case of loss, which is caused by divorce and is expressed as a decline in the economic and social status, there may be significant changes in the child’s identity and abilities to be independent (DeGarmo & Kitson (1996). In recent years, it is possible to identify the significant rise in the divorce rate, both in Israel and in the world. According to Amato (2010), the expectation is that about 40% of all the first marriages in the United States will end with divorce. Similarly, according to the data of the Central Bureau of Statistics (2016), in Israel the divorce rate has reached 20 divorced people for every one thousand marriages (about 2%), as opposed to 13 divorced people for every one thousand marriages in the 1980s. As a result of this sharp increase in the divorce rate, every year there has been an increase in the percentage of children who must deal with the divorce process and adjust to the dramatic change in their lives. As noted in the research of McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider (2013), who carried out a broad survey of previous researches discussing divorce, the separation of the child’s parents has a significant negative effect on their wellbeing. Particularly, this is

significant harm to the children's social-emotional development. In addition, the number of researchers agreed that the attachment that characterizes the relationship between the parents and the children also predicts the degree of traumatic impact of the divorce on the child's cognitive development and wellbeing (Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2004; Nepomnyaschy & Teitler, 2013). The researchers Kowaleski-Jones and Dunifon (2004) emphasize that the attachment style can influence the coping processes with the impact of divorce in the long term.

Parental divorce and union dissolution is an increasingly common experience for children in all developed countries. It has raised the debate on whether parental divorce is damaging for children's well-being and to what extent parents should remain together for the sake of the children. one of the most extensively discussed topics in the literature has been the average effects of divorce on children well-being (Gariga, Pennoni, 2020). The divorce process has significant effects on the children. Some of the emotional effects: VanderValk et al. (2005) and Amato and Keith (1991) found that children of divorced parents tend to reflect behavior that challenges the social norms, through anger and hatred towards others. Moreover, the research study of Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2001), which focused on the long-term research of the influence of divorce on the children's emotions, found that a decade after the divorce the children displayed low self-image and saw themselves to be survivors of the divorce proceedings. The children in the research reported the negative influence of the divorce on their lives and difficult memories with which they are forced to cope every day. About one-half of the respondents said that during adolescence they experienced anxiety, excessive concern, and depression, which influenced their achievements in the continuation of their life. In addition, they reported feelings of disappointment, anger, and hatred. Social effects: Many previous research studies report the real harm of the divorce proceedings to the children's ability to adjust to a social framework and to create interpersonal relationships. According to Wallerstein and Lewis (2004), children of divorced parents lack trust in others and are characterized by excessive control of the system of relations. The researchers hold that there are difficulties in the development of independence, vulnerability, and identification of the conflict as a risk. Similarly, according to Amato and Keith (1991) children of divorced parents tend to have a low level of social satisfaction, including the evaluation of social support, the quality of the relationship with the spouse, the number of friends and social involvement.

#### Materials on Focusing Method

Focusing is a particular process of attention that supports therapeutic change, a process that has been linked in more than 50 research studies with successful outcomes in psychotherapy (Hendricks, 2001). Facilitating Focusing in our clients can enable natural and adaptive change in body, mind, and behavior. Focusing It is a way of understanding and guiding what some people naturally do, and what everyone has the ability to do, when they are faced with the need for change (Weiser Cornell, 2013). Hendricks (2001) and Gendlin (1981) found that the experiential way in which a client experiences a painful situation is the significant and key factor in the continuation of the therapeutic process. In order to return to and process this experience, it is necessary to be aware of the bodily experience that was felt. Some clients are unable to do this naturally, therefore, Focusing is a guided process that helps the client establish a certain contact with their inner experience. When Gendlin (1981) understood the profound significance of contact with the client's inner experience, he decided to find a way to guide them toward it, and thus the Focusing method was born. Focusing is a guided process, developed out of the need to support clients who were unable to enter into their painful experience and process it naturally on their own (Hendricks, 2001). Your body is a living experience. this is a remarkable breakthrough in understanding, as the body is not merely physiological, but holds much deeper meanings, remembering and interpreting experiences, creating defense mechanisms, and existing as a constantly pulsating and evolving entity (Weiser Cornell, 2013). The Focusing method includes two significant pathways that the client must follow in order to undergo a meaningful bodily and emotional process: 1. Focusing on bodily sensations, staying with them. 2. paying attention to the way the experienced situation is described.

The Focusing method works by having the client pay attention to something sensed in the body, a bodily felt experience that is not yet entirely clear, and then focusing on it. The focus is on the *felt sense* in the body, not on thoughts and not on memories, but on the physical sensation that arises with the experience. There is a forward movement toward new discovery, and each step brings relief to the difficult bodily symptoms (Hendricks, 2001). Focusing are the pause and the ability to connect not only to a memory or an emotion, but to a concrete bodily sensation, and through recognizing it, a process of change begins (Weiser Cornell, 2013). In Focusing, the body is the key. Clients who can sense, at a bodily level, the difficult experience they have gone through, who can come into contact with it, work with it, and move forward to the next stage of their development, are inevitably more successful in the therapeutic process compared to clients who do not allow space for their bodily experiences. (Weiser Cornell, 2013). Focusing can help the client deepen and grow spiritually, and through this, the client will experience life in a richer and more fulfilling way (Hinterkopf, 2015). 2. Gendlin (1996), found that the way a client describes their experience, and the level at which they feel the bodily experience, is critical for understanding the client's awareness of how they are experiencing it. The Focusing process recognized the importance of the client's

manner of speaking—not from a place of intellectual or cognitive processing, but as a creation of contact with their bodily experience. According to Gendlin (1996) and Weiser (2013), there are three levels by which a client's experience can be classified: low, medium, and high experiential levels. Each level reflects the way the person perceives their experience, the degree of attention they give to how they felt in the situation, their ability to talk about the emotions they experienced, and whether bodily sensations were present or not. All of these indicate the client's experiential level and their degree of involvement in the situation. A client who develops the ability to notice their bodily experience, to experience it at a high level, both physically and emotionally, and then to stay with it and focus on it, has a higher likelihood of healing. Focusing on bodily sensations, together with paying attention to the way the client describes the experience they went through, can create a significant change in how the experience is perceived, bring relief to the bodily sensations, and foster a more nurturing relationship between the client and themselves and with those around them. The advantages of the method are many, some are documented in academic writing, while the greater part is deeply recorded within the human psyche. Clients who succeed in therapy become stronger, better able to handle their lives, and less reactive to stressful triggers. Their relationships with others become a source of support rather than a source of burden or suffering. Additionally, a person who has been withdrawn and emotionally closed for most of their life, thanks to therapy, is able to discover a new ability to connect socially with others, while still honoring their need to be in their own company. Another person, who depends on having people around them, is able through therapy to develop a new capacity to cope with and even enjoy their alone time, while continuing to maintain nurturing connections with others. What may seem like opposite outcomes are actually movements in a positive direction and align with the unique process of each individual in a way that no general formula could achieve so precisely (Weiser Cornell, 2013). Among the additional advantages offered by the Focusing method are the following: 1. The ability to sit quietly with one's difficulty and to listen to the inner voice that speaks continuously, yet is often difficult to hear amid the rush of daily life. Some individuals have reported that Focusing helps them experience a sense of spaciousness or emptiness in the face of reality. 2. The capacity to experience situations in a calmer and safer manner. Several clients noted that after engaging in Focusing, they felt a greater sense of closeness to others, to themselves, and to God. 3. The development of an increased ability to release control over matters that are not truly within one's control, allowing for a more peaceful experience of the present moment. 4. A heightened attunement to one's quiet inner voice, which provides guidance toward the most fitting personal direction. Clients have described a stronger sense of internal connection and enhanced clarity in their lives. 5. An expanded capacity for forgiveness, both toward oneself and toward others. 6. The development of a deeper sense of meaning in life. The ability to focus often brings a greater sense of purpose and significance to daily experience (Hinterkopf, 2015).

### 3. RESULTS

Within the framework of the theoretical research I conducted, I found very few studies examining the relationship between body-centered Focusing and coping with divorce, and even fewer addressing how children cope with divorce in the context of the Focusing method. Most of the available literature focused on adults and their coping processes.

In a study by Aminiha and Azadeh (2020) that examined the effectiveness of emotion-focused interventions in couples experiencing divorce, it was observed that a very high percentage of couples on the verge of divorce had deep emotional issues that caused the rift between them, more so than other factors. This led to the conclusion that emotion-focused therapy could indeed reduce divorce rates or help couples cope more effectively with the process. However, the study did not mention the body-centered Focusing method or its specific therapeutic techniques. Shavandi and Khanjani Veshki (2021) found that the Focusing method and its associated therapy dramatically reduced the percentage of women experiencing severe self-criticism and anxiety. The study demonstrated that by applying the technique of “awareness of the present moment and behavior consistent with reality,” the researcher was able to train the women in the experimental group, who were seeking divorce, to identify their negative thoughts and emotions. This enabled them to avoid biases regarding life events and incorrect judgments, and consequently recognize and eliminate self-critical thoughts. Moreover, the training strengthened the women's resilience and their ability to experience cognitive and emotional events without judgment. Salehi and Davarani (2025) found that the dimensions of interpersonal sensitivity, need for approval, separation anxiety, shyness, and low self-esteem among couples on the verge of divorce significantly decreased after training in the emotion-focused approach. They also noted that the long-term impact on divorce rates could be substantial. The couples were able to reduce anxiety and self-critical thoughts arising from marital life crises, as well as decrease the level of marital conflict. In this regard, the researchers argue that this therapy provides significant support to clients by fostering or strengthening an internal compassionate relationship with themselves, rather than promoting reprimand, blame, or self-criticism (Shavandi and Khanjani Veshki, 2021). Many relevant studies have focused on women or couples and

emotion-focused training, rather than on the Focusing method, which specifically emphasizes the significant bodily experience of the individual. I found no theoretical materials examining the relationship between the Focusing method and children's coping with their parents' divorce, and theoretical resources combining these two fields of research were extremely limited.

#### 4. DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Based on the theoretical examination I conducted, the following conclusions can be drawn: the impact of the divorce process on children is critical and highly significant for their future lives. The new family relationships that emerge from the separation will largely determine whether the family successfully navigates the crisis or not. Therefore, it is our responsibility to invest in these relationships and not allow pain and anger to govern us, thereby making this process even more challenging.

This conclusion led me to the next insight: the necessity of integrating the body-centered Focusing method into the family healing process. Through my theoretical examination, I observed the profound impact that the Focusing method has on an individual's relationship with themselves and with their surroundings, as well as the positive emotions it fosters in resolving past pain and building resilience.

Moreover, the theoretical research revealed that the body-centered Focusing approach, when combined with coping with divorce, is still a significantly underexplored field. Therefore, I intend to continue with empirical research to substantiate the theoretical claims I have proposed. I believe that the integration of Focusing attending to and pausing within difficult bodily experiences with the experiences of divorce has the potential to create a novel alternative for positive family growth and development.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In future research, I would very much like to examine the integration of two theoretical fields: the study of divorce and its effects on the family, and the field of personal development through the Focusing method, at an empirical level. Based on the findings explored in this paper, I recommend integrating the Focusing method into family communication and into the divorce process within the family. The method offers significant advantages: it enables family members to deepen their self-awareness, process emotional pain in a safe and structured way, and develop healthier interpersonal communication—both within the family unit and at the individual level. There are also recommendations for the use of the Focusing method from additional fields relevant to family life. Focusing can influence the individual and transform the way they perceive the behaviors of others. The method provides an authentic and honest inward look, one that prevents escaping into frustration or fear, and instead “requires” a person to confront wounds or unresolved pain that manifest in present-day reality to prevent these unresolved wounds from negatively affecting current life—such as relationships with children, work, or social interactions—we must be willing to look inward.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank dear professor Petrana Stoykova for her great support and her comments that contributed to the accuracy and advancement of the research.

#### REFERENCES

- Amato, P. R. (2010). Research on divorce: Continuing trends and new developments. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 72, 650–666.
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 110(1), 26–46.
- Amato, P. R., Johnson, D. R., Booth, A., & Rogers, S. J. (2003). Continuity and change in marital quality between 1980 and 2000. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 65, 1–22.
- Central Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Overall divorce rate in Israel* (Hebrew). Retrieved from <https://old.cbs.gov.il/publications/pw98.pdf>
- Cornell, A. W. (2013). *Focusing in clinical practice: The essence of change*. W. W. Norton Professional Books.
- DeGarmo, D. S., & Kitson, G. C. (1996). Identity relevance and disruption as predictors of psychological distress for widowed and divorced women. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 983–997.
- Garriga, A., & Pennoni, F. (2020). *The causal effects of parental divorce and parental temporary separation on children's cognitive abilities and psychological well-being according to parental relationship quality* [Working paper]. Italy & Barcelona.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1981). *Focusing*. Bantam.
- Gendlin, E. T. (1996). *Focusing-oriented psychotherapy*. Guilford Press.

- Hendricks, M. N. (2001). Focusing-oriented/experiential psychotherapy. In D. Cain & J. Seeman (Eds.), *Humanistic psychotherapies: Handbook of research and practice* (pp. xx–xx). American Psychological Association.
- Hinterkopf, E. (2015). *Integrating spirituality in counseling: A manual for using the experiential focusing method*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Kianipour, F., & Aminiha, A. (2020). [Article title missing]. *Journal of Family Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Azad University, South Tehran.
- Kowaleski-Jones, L., & Dunifon, R. (2004). Children's home environments: Understanding the role of family structure changes. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(1), 3–28.
- McLanahan, S., Tach, L., & Schneider, D. (2013). The causal effects of father absence. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39, 399–427.
- Nepomnyaschy, L., & Teitler, J. (2013). Cyclical cohabitation among unmarried parents in fragile families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 75, 1248–1265.
- Rabin, K. (2010). *The new divorce – Positive change in the period of transition and afterwards* (Hebrew). Amatzia.
- Salehi, S., & Fadakar Davarani, F. (2025). *Investigating the effectiveness of emotionally-focused approach training on improving interpersonal sensitivity in couples on the verge of divorce*. Qom Azad University & Allameh Tabataba'i University, Iran.
- Shavandi, H., Veshki, V., & Khanjani, S. (2021). Effectiveness of compassion-focused therapy on self-criticism of women applying for divorce. *Journal of Education and Health*. Arak University, Iran.
- Thomas, C., & Ryan, M. (2008). Women's perception of the divorce experience: A qualitative study. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 49, 210–224.
- VanderValk, I., Spruijt, E., de Goede, M., Maas, C., & Meeus, W. (2005). Family structure and problem behavior of adolescents and young adults: A growth-curve study. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 34(6), 553–546.
- Wallerstein, J. S., & Lewis, J. M. (2004). The unexpected legacy of divorce: Report of a 25-year study. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 21(3), 353–370.
- Wallerstein, J. S., Lewis, J. M., & Blakeslee, S. (2001). *The unexpected legacy of divorce: A 25-year landmark study*. Hyperion