4/12/18
Dispute Resolution Center | Parents Apart: Session 1
 In this session, Marsha initiated the group with an activity. This activity was for them to draw upon a difficult situation and to recall how everyone might have felt. We then explored how things could have been done differently to be more effective. From there, we went into introductions where dyads introduced their partner to the class. All of the parents there were happy and eager to make a difference in their child’s life for the better. Once completed, we moved onto the main predictors of kid success. These are defined by the level on conflict between parents and the child ability to feel comfortable loving both parents. Marsha had each parent take out pictures of their children to glance at when the parents lose track, get distracted or let their emotions get in the way of the goal. We then eased into the children’s bill of rights. This was a good learning topic as although parents care about their children, they may forget that they too are people whose rights must be considered and protected. We dove into active listening and the benefits for everyone involved. Skills such as validation and restating are useful when working with kids that do not want to talk much. Leaving questions unbiased and open ended allows kids to explore their feelings even more. After a break, we watched the video of parents and kids discussing their experience during divorce and how it impacts everyone. This set a melancholy mood that encouraged parents even more to create a good environment for their children. Marsha and I worked through a role play of a daughter and her father having a discussion in two forms, one more effective than the other. We used this to illustrate how we can control communicative outcomes. This led into our last activity in which dyads worked through their own roleplays. I got a positive sense that this was helpful to many parents and eye opening. The class concluded and was dismissed.
4/19/18
Dispute Resolution Center | Parents Apart: Session 2
 All eleven participants were on time at the bringing of the session. Marsha reviewed skills from the previous class and asked for feedback on if any was used. Parents claimed the skills they utilized were “helpful”, “useful” and grateful for the knowledge. We then went around the room for anyone to update the rest of the class on their week and any obstacles they might have faced. We worked through these problems together as a class. This was positive as many parents spoke up and made useful suggestions to other parents. We moved into co-parenting tips and types. We covered parallel parenting in which each parents have their own rules versus cooperative parenting where they coordinate behavior and punishments. When struggling with parenting forms, it is important to treat co-parenting as a business. Marsha explained how having an agenda, meeting time/place and restricting other people can help create a positive environment for communication. To maintain this, Marsha went over the common pitfalls of parents and children that can lead to conflict. This includes using the kid as a messenger, asking about the other parent, guilting the child and making them choose between them. For the child, they might threaten to not visit, claim one parent allows something the other does not and making demands of the parents. Acknowledging these patterns can help better prepare parents and stay out of conflict with their co-parent. We discussed the use of I-messages and person-centered discussion to avoid defensive reactions and misunderstandings. We then opened a legal question and answer in whish Marsha helped direct them to information and aid. The class then concluded and the participants filled out their evaluation to receive their certificate.

 *Feedback*
 This class seems to be educational and productive to the participants. They could use more understanding of child psychology such at ethnocentrisms and how kids see the world. This will allow them to relate to the children more when they show displeasure. I thought the possible behaviors of children at each stage was beneficial. Additionally, I think the parents should be reminded that when divorce happens, the kids’ idea of love, parents, family and their self-identity are challenged and that keeping them in the dark is not helpful. While you should not overload your child with messy details, they should understand the basics. The class should be presented with other resources such as DRC mediation as they seemed to be unaware of its benefits. Another thing I feel that parents who have poor communication with their co-parents could use is a journal. By having a shared journal the kid can carry (and can decorate with each parent as an additional shared project) the parents and kid can write down the child feelings, experiences and eating habits so the other parents can be aware that her child, John kept coughing after drinking milk or etc. This is a way to secure communication that is child-focused and eliminates possibility of aggressive note passing since the child will be looking at it too. For parents who argue over house rules, writing down house rules and going over them when they switch houses is a good way to refresh their minds and prepare them for how you want them to behave. Kids blossom in descriptive and orderly routine and need it for stability in the early years.