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# Introduction

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Change is an inevitable part of life. Coping with life's difficult changes can be somewhat like taking lemons and making lemonade. Ironically, a divorce in my own life led me back to graduate school where I studied to become a school counselor.

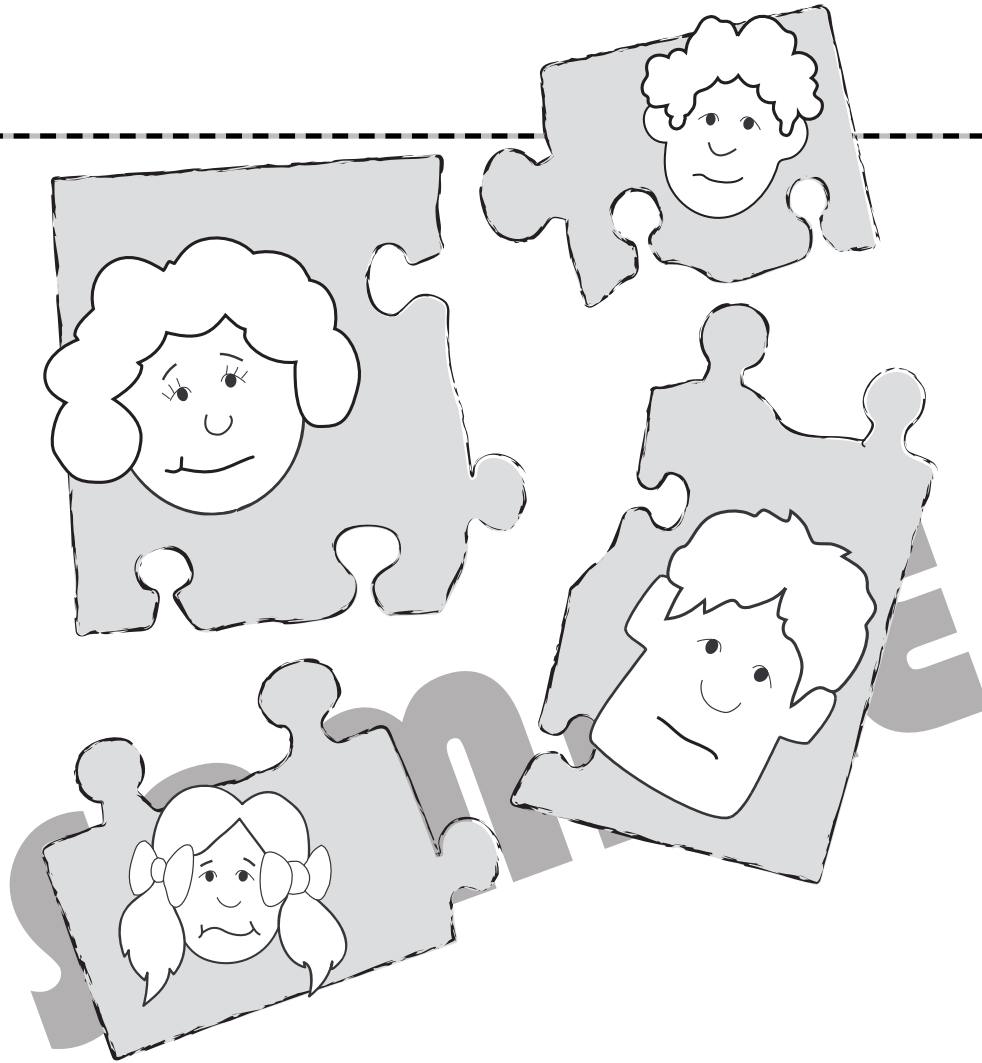
Since that time, my heart has been touched by hundreds of children and youth struggling to put the scattered pieces of their lives back together in response to family changes beyond their control. Separation, divorce, incarceration, death, re-marriage and relocation through moving or military deployment are a few of the life events that change families and often create challenges or obstacles for the children involved. This book focuses primarily on parental loss through a separation or divorce, but may be adapted to other situations in which children are dealing with feelings of loss or abandonment.

Counselors and other caring adults may use this resource to help children share their thoughts and feelings about the changes in their families. An introductory student survey assesses the nature of the child's family changes. Next there is a read-aloud storybook which compares a family to a jigsaw puzzle with many interlocking pieces. When the pieces come apart or a piece is missing for some reason, children often experience grief symptoms. After reading and discussing the storybook with the child, the facilitator may choose from twenty-one reproducible student activities that are designed to help children move through the five stages of the grief process and adjust to their new circumstances. I have provided more activities in the denial and anger stages than in the bargaining, depression and acceptance stages because, in my experience as a school counselor, I found the majority of students struggling through the anger and denial stages. Additionally, children who get stuck in the depression/sadness stage may need professional help beyond this resource.

The final section (Appendix) contains research, resources and helpful handouts for teachers, parents or other caregivers.

It is my hope that together we can help struggling children build a happy, although different, life within their new family structure.

*Janet Bender*



Sometimes things happen which change the way the family puzzle fits together. The pieces may come apart or a piece may be missing because of separation, divorce, death, jail, moving or other changes. How has your family changed?

What are some other things that may cause change in a family?

# Puzzling Feelings

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Enlarge and reproduce the puzzle on cardstock. Cut out the pieces. Turn upside down on a table. As student turns over one puzzle piece at a time, ask the student to tell about a time he/she felt the feeling written on the puzzle piece. When all feelings have been discussed, help the student assemble the puzzle. The puzzle may be given to the student in a Ziploc<sup>®</sup> bag or envelope to take home and use with friends or family members.

