

BEGINNING EXPERIENCE®

International Ministry Center
1657 Commerce Drive, Ste. 2B
South Bend, Indiana 46628-1542
United States of America

Facts...



www.beginningexperience.org

Beginning Experience International Ministry, Inc. helps separated, divorced and widowed persons and their children resolve the grief that results from the loss of a marriage.

The situation:

- New widows and widowers number 800,000 annually
- The loss of a spouse is one of the most profound losses we ever know
- Half of U.S. marriages continue to end in divorce
- For every divorce, two adults grieve
- Over 1.1 million children are affected annually by divorce

The Beginning Experience® ministry:

- *Vision:* A grieving people, healed, transformed and free again to love themselves, others and God.
- *Mission:* The purpose of the Beginning Experience® ministry is to facilitate the grief resolution process for adults and children who have suffered loss through death, divorce or separation, thereby enabling them to again love themselves, others and God.

We accomplish the purpose by offering quality, copyrighted, grief resolution programs presented by trained peer ministers. These programs are designed to move grieving people through a transformational process to a new beginning in their lives.

We believe that:

- Through resolving the grief of significant loss, individuals participate in the death and resurrection of Christ as he lives in the world today;
- Those working through this experience can effectively walk with others for whom the experience is new and hard
- The invitation to recover offers an opportunity for transforming one's life, and for freeing individuals to love self, others and God in new and deeper ways.

Origin:

Developed in 1974 in Fort Worth, Texas by Sister Josephine Stewart, SSMN, a family therapist and Jo Lamia, a divorced woman and educator.

Structure:

- Governed by an International Board of Directors:
 - 7 to 11 member board chosen from U.S. and Canadian team membership
 - Responsible for policy and planning for the long-range needs of the organization.
 - Hires an executive director to staff an International Ministry Center from which day-to-day services are provided
- Administered by an International Ministry Center:
 - Charged with providing training, technical and material support to teams in local communities, monitoring the integrity of the programs and the quality of team service, and implementing board policies and plans
 - Certifies local teams to present the programs
 - Holds the federal tax exempt status for all teams in the United States
 - General operations funded by fees for service, stewardship from teams, and gifts.
 - 2011-2012 annual operating budget \$200,000
- Services provided by Local Teams:
 - Composed of trained volunteers selected from program participants
 - Responsible for delivery of the ministry's programs to a given area
 - Affiliated in a reporting capacity to the local Catholic diocese or, in limited instances, other denominational affiliation
 - Funded through participant program fees, gifts, product sales and special events
 - Governed by a board chosen from the membership

Core values:

- Respect and appreciation for the indissolubility of sacramental marriage
- Realization that with the death of a spouse, the marriage ends
- Realization that for others, despite marriage preparation ministries, ministries to enhance and strengthen marriage, and ministries to help troubled marriages, many end in divorce
- It is an expression of Christ's compassion to reach out to those grieving the end of a marriage whether from death or divorce.

Statistics:

- 70 adult teams in the U.S., Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Singapore; 5 teams offer programs for children, youth and young adults
- In the U.S., served over 2,000 adults in the weekend program alone in 2011; many more served through pre- and post-weekend programs
- Adult participants:
 - 24% male; 76% female
 - 52% Catholic; 31% other faith; 17% unknown
 - 50% divorced; 22% separated; 23% widowed
 - Approximately 50% age 44 or below; 50% age 45 or above
 - 90% Caucasian; 6% Hispanic; 2% Asian or of African descent

Participants report these results:

- Leads to healthier family relationships
- Increases emotional health and self-respect, deepens faith
- Verifies that feelings of denial, anger, etc., after the death or divorce are “normal”
- Provides tools to deal with the pain of the loss
- Enhances contribution to employer, church and community

What adult participants say...

“I was nervous about going to the weekend, but I'm glad I did. I feel more alive than I have in years.”

“...my first step out of grief and self pity. I took a fresh look at the choices I have to make my life a good one.”

“I found people all around who accepted me without judgment and cared for me.”

“It was a time just for me, to explore where I've been in my life and where I'm going.”

“I have so much more energy now for my children and my job.”

“It was the best gift I ever gave myself.”

What the children say...

“I see that there are other kids out there going through the same things I am. I see that I'm not the only one struggling through life.”

“Beginning Experience® helped me deal with the pain and hurt.”

“I am not the only one with problems. There are a lot more people who care than I thought.”

“I learned that many other kids experience the same feelings I do.”

“I learned that I really do need other people.”