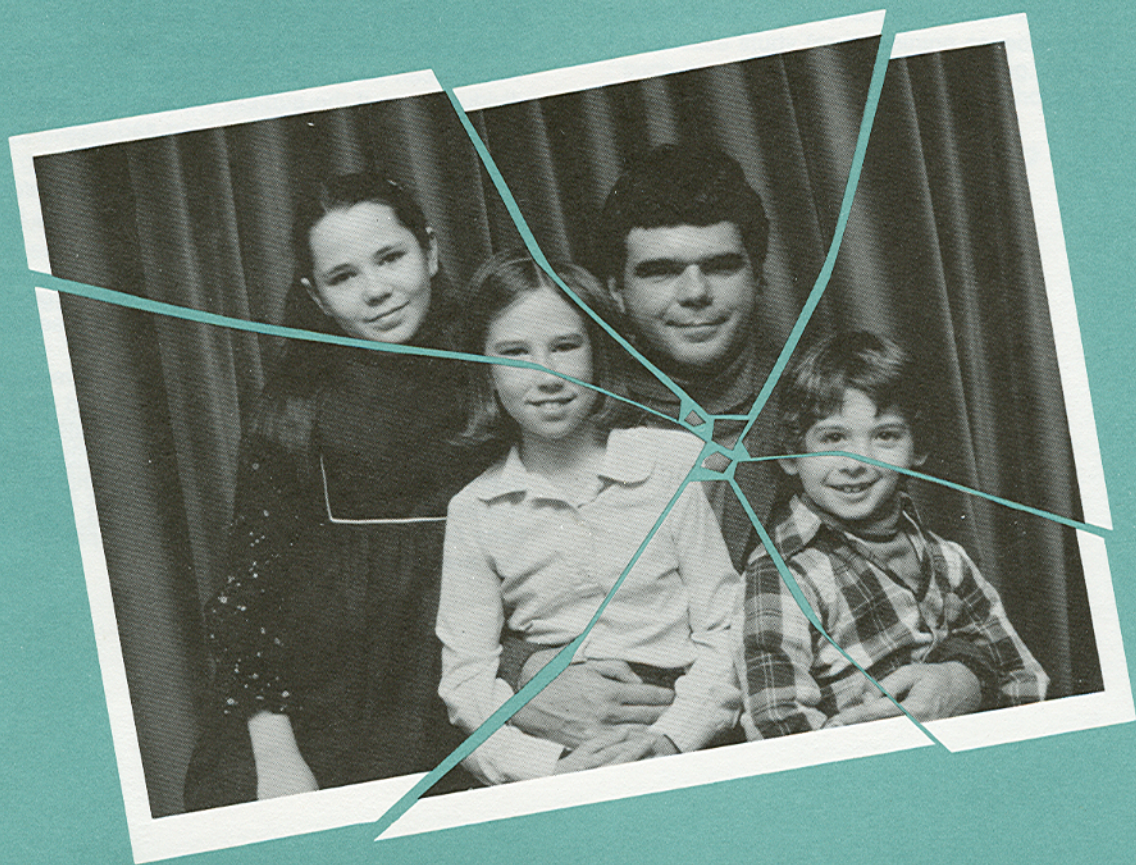


A Discussion Guide for the Film

THE WAY IT IS



National
Film Board
of Canada

Office
national du film
du Canada

How to Use This Guide

The guide is structured in three separate sections for three specific audiences — children (pre-adolescents), adolescents, and adult viewers.

Rather than repeat questions relevant to all three groups, it has been left to discussion leaders to include questions from the preceding sections.

Using Film Effectively

Make sure that the technical arrangements for screening the film are all in hand so that you can assume your main role as program leader. Many different approaches may then be taken.

- The most common method is the simple introduction of the film followed by its screening, and then a discussion led by the teacher or counsellor. It is important to use techniques that sustain lively interchange and maximum participation from viewers.
- To make the screening an even richer experience, viewers can be asked to watch for certain things individually, or, if the audience is large, in groups with each group observing, analyzing and reporting on a different aspect of the film.
- A film like *The Way It Is*, in which a story unfolds, can be stopped at strategic points, the room lights turned on, and viewers asked either
 - a) what they think is going to happen,
 - b) what they would do in such a situation, or
 - c) to take character roles and act out the sequence to completion.

Note: for role playing, no correlation between the age, sex or disposition of the character and the “actor” is required. On the contrary, role reversals are often effective. Players can be asked to describe their feelings as they begin to identify with the chosen character, to describe the pressure they felt, the options they saw, and why they took the particular action they did.

The **FILM**

The Way It Is is a sensitive drama that examines the effects of separation and divorce on a family, and particularly on the 12-year-old daughter, Helen. It is a film about hurt, anger, the difficulties of communicating within a family and, finally, about coping in a positive way.

For two years her father has been living in a distant city, and Helen has still not come to terms with this reality. She is seen confronting the painful truth, playing the role of older sister to two other children, and playing a special part in the life of her mother with whom she lives.

This film documents the many changes in the family's dynamics brought about by the divorce, and follows Helen's growth as an individual as she learns to cope with this major upset in her life.

The Murrays are a normal family going through a particular crisis which, though painful and upsetting, is within the experience of a significant number of Canadian families.

Themes

- coping positively with family break-up
- tensions and crises within a family
- communications within the family
- child-parent relationships
- the single-parent family

Uses

This film can be used for a number of purposes:

- to stimulate discussion in the classroom about the family, family problems, and alternate family structures
 - as a focus for seminars and meetings of single-parent groups
 - as a tool for pre- and in-service training of teachers, social workers, and family life counsellors
 - as a case study for examining aspects of the family such as marriage, divorce, parenting, communication and relationships in sociology, psychology and family life courses
 - for individual and couples counselling
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For discussion with **CHILDREN**

Before the Screening

1) Ask students to describe an experience in which they felt angry at one of their parents, and to relate whether they were able to express their anger in a way that improved the situation.

2) Ask students to note as they watch the film:

- how Helen feels and acts toward her mother, her father, her sister and brother
- how Helen's mother feels and how she expresses those feelings
- how ideas and feelings are expressed in this family — ways that work and ways that don't work

After the Screening

1) Encourage students to discuss the feelings and actions that they were asked to observe in the film prior to the screening.

2) Ask other questions, such as the following, to explore the film experience in as much depth as possible:

- Is Helen different from others her age? Explain your answer.
- What are some of the problems that Helen is faced with in this film?
- Name some of the feelings that Helen has toward her parents.
- Like most of us, Helen has mixed feelings toward the people who are important to her. We can both love and hate a person at the same time. Give examples of Helen's mixed feelings toward her father, mother, brother.
- What was your reaction when Helen's mother made her get back on the phone with her father? Why do you suppose Helen acted that way?
- Like Helen, her mother also has many mixed feelings toward both her children and her former husband. What are some of the problems that the mother is facing?

- Like Helen and her mother, the father may also have mixed feelings toward his children and his former wife. What are some of the problems that the father is facing? What feelings do you think he has? Do you think that by moving away he has shown that he no longer cares about his family?
 - Was Karen's spending time talking to her horse helpful to her? Who do you find to talk to?
 - In order to adjust to the father's leaving, the Murray family had to learn different ways of working together and getting along with each other. Tell about some of the changes that took place.
 - Think of other things, such as sickness or a parent losing a job, which would make life difficult for a family. What changes would have to be made by family members?
 - There were certain things that Helen did not want discussed freely with others and other things that her mother felt should not be discussed. How do you feel about keeping some things private within a family? When is it a good idea — and when is it not?
 - Was Helen being selfish to say "I have to make it the best I can — for me"? Does this seem like a good idea?
 - During the film Helen said, "I like love stories that have happy endings." What do you think she meant by this? What are your thoughts and feelings about how this film ended?
 - Helen, like most 12-year-olds, has problems, and what we learn about her may help us to better understand ourselves. List the problems that Helen faces that you think all of us face in growing up.
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For discussion with **ADOLESCENTS**

Before the Screening

1) Elizabeth Kübler-Ross has described the psychological stages of adjusting to death as separation, denial, anger, guilt, bargaining, and acceptance. These stages may be part of an adjustment to other traumatic events as well.

Ask students to draw on their personal experience or that of acquaintances to discuss the validity of this model. Discuss the emotional pain of loss. Direct students to observe these stages in action in the film and to note the various ways of coping.

2) Consider the film to be a case study of a family and ask viewers to consider the following questions while watching the film:

- What are the major problems facing the main characters in this film?
- What are the obvious factors contributing to those problems?
- Is divorce the cause of the problems, or is it a consequence? If divorce is not the cause of the problems, what is?
- How do the different family members involved see the situation, feel about it, and see themselves in relation to it?
- How accurate a picture do the family members have of the situation?
- What approaches can be used to work constructively on a situation such as the one portrayed in the film?

After the Screening

- 1) Discuss the observations of the students relating to the pre-screening discussion and questions.
 - 2) Consider some of the post-screening questions from the section for children.
 - 3) For further discussion:
 - As the story unfolds we learn that Helen and her mother are not coping as well as they think they are or as well as they would like us to believe. What are the consequences of suppressing true feelings, and hiding them from others?
 - Ways of obtaining and giving emotional support within a family become patterned, and the major sources from which family members gain support differ greatly. Give some examples of how the family members in the film derived emotional support and describe how these patterns were changed by the divorce.
 - In every family, members develop a set of personal roles. Some common examples include: the “baby” in the family, the boss, the wit. Such roles can become fixed very quickly and can have large consequences. Explain how this worked in the Murray family.
 - React to the following statements: “The traditional family in our culture, where Dad works and Mom stays home, is an endangered species to which families have bid a fond but firm farewell” ...or, “To cope with the new varieties of family, society must adapt to the increasing numbers of working mothers and single parents, and stop pining for an ‘ideal family’ that rarely existed or worked very well anyway.” Discuss alternate family structures (separated, extended, joined) and ways in which schools and community services respond or fail to respond to them.
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For discussion with **ADULTS**

Before the Screening

1) Ask participants to discuss the quote, "If I'm not for myself, what am I? If I am only for myself, who am I?", and to describe a situation where they felt tension when attempting to balance their own needs with those of family members. Role-play a scenario that shows how they felt and responded in the situation.

2) Draw on and adapt pre-screening activities from the previous two sections of this guide and suggest that participants' observations be further directed to:

- recalling examples from experience that support points made in the film, and others that contrast with points made in the film
- identifying ideas in the film that seem worth trying out
- speculating from the evidence given about what the father may have been going through

After the Screening

1) Ask viewers to relate the quote discussed in the pre-screening section to Helen's experience.

2) Use appropriate questions and activities from the preceding two sections and consider the following:

- All families develop norms about who says what to whom, and how, both verbally and non-verbally. Describe this family's communication system. Are family members encouraged to let other members know what they think and feel? Are there shared understandings about what can be said and what can't be said, tacit agreements about what is private (within the family) and what can be discussed publicly? Is there consistency and clarity in the message given or are there double messages?
 - What kinds of emotional support is the mother getting? Does it seem to be working?
 - When Helen was angry at her father, her explosion was directed at her mother. Is this common? How do you feel about the mother's handling of the situation with the phone call?
 - The Murray family has been in its present situation for about two years. How would you rate the way they seem to have resolved the difficulties stemming from the divorce? Helen says, in the final line in the film, "I'm still working on it." Do you think this would be an appropriate line for the mother too? If so, what has she got to "work on"?
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Print Resources on Children and Family Break-up

For Children

Troyer, Warner. **Divorced Kids**. Toronto: Clark, Irwin, 1979.

Gardner, Richard. **Boys' and Girls' Book about Divorce**. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.

Robson, B. **My Parents Are Divorced Too**. New York: Everest House, 1980.

For Adults

When Families Break Up. Canadian Mental Health Association, 2160 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario, M4S 2Z3.

Children in a Single Parent Home. Four-page pamphlet developed by Parents Without Partners, free copy — stamped self-addressed envelope to P.W.P., 7910 Woodmount Avenue, Washington, D.C. 20014.

Hetherington, E.M., Cox, M., & Cox, R. "The Aftermath of Divorce." In J.H. Stevens, Jr. and M. Mathews (eds.) **Mother-Child, Father-Child Relationships**. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1978.

Wallerstein, Judith S. & Kelly, Joan B. **Surviving the Breakup — How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce**. New York: Basic Books, 1980.

Schlesinger, Benjamin. **One in Ten: The Single Parent in Canada**. Toronto: Guidance Centre, Faculty of Education, U. of T., 1979.

The One-Parent Family: Perspectives and Annotated Bibliography. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978.

Related Films

It's Just Better 15 min. 1982

Distributed by NFB — 106C 0182 066

A film for children about a ten-year-old boy and his nine brothers and sisters who live on welfare with their mother and manage, by "pulling together."

Yours Truly, Andrea G. Stern 38 min. 1979

Distributed by International Tele-Film Enterprises

A ten-year-old girl struggles with the problem of sharing her mother with a boyfriend who has just moved into their home.

How about Saturday 20 min. 1979

Distributed by Magic Lantern Film Distributors Ltd

Explores the emotional aspects of separation and divorce from a child's point of view.

Things Are Different Now 15 min. 1978

Distributed by International Tele-Film Enterprises

A twelve-year-old boy and his perceptions of the recent divorce of his parents.

First It Seemed Kinda Strange 6 min. 1977

Distributed by Visual Education Centre

A young boy tells how he learned to cope with his parents' divorce and how he has become more open about his feelings toward them.

The Way It Is

16 mm Color

106C 0182 097

Screening time: 24 minutes 13 seconds

Produced and distributed by
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