

How to Help Your Kids Cope With Divorce

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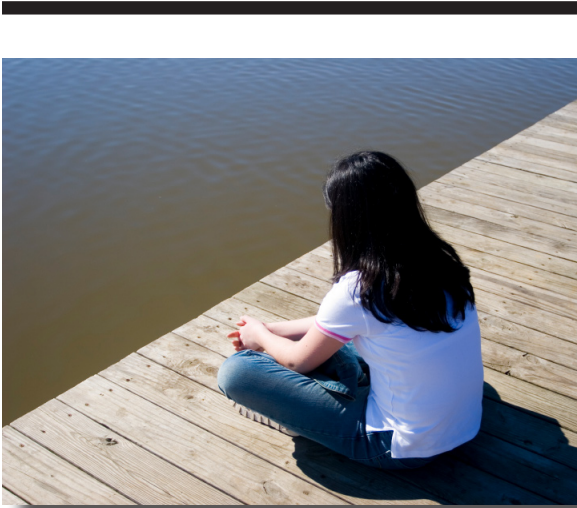
Divorce is Different Here



About this book



INTRODUCTION



Conventional wisdom taught us that parents trapped in unhappy marriages needed to stay together for the sake of the family or risk damaging their children for life. More recent research, however, paints a much brighter picture of divorce when parents put their own emotions aside and focus on what's truly best for the kids. Many child psychologists now say that it isn't the divorce that damages children, it's how their parents handle that divorce that has the greatest impact.

A University of Virginia study in 2002 that followed 2,500 children of divorce over a 30-year period found that most had bounced back within two years and that 80 per cent suffered little or no long-term effects from divorce.

"Now, there's less stigma around divorce," says Jennifer Coleman, Life Transition Coach with Rosen Law Firm. "People are seeing that it's possible to 'divorce well' and try to make divorce a healing process, rather than a damaging process."

Parents who are able to put aside their differences and focus on their children's needs can raise children as happy and secure as those in intact marriages. However, parents who fight constantly, engage in long custody battles, and put their children in the middle of a matrimonial tug-of-war can leave their children with a legacy of emotional wounds.

Of course, divorce under the best of circumstances is still a difficult time for children. They will feel sad, angry, and confused when they're told the news. But kids thrive in happy, stable homes – whether their parents are together or apart. Divorce may mean the end of a marriage, but it isn't the end of a family.

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BREAKING THE NEWS

SOME FACTS ABOUT DIVORCE

Every year, more than a million children experience divorce. Nearly half of children will eventually see their parents divorce or separate, while about 25 per cent will become part of a blended family of step-parents and half-siblings. Nearly 15 per cent will watch their parents divorce more than once.

Despite those statistics, divorce rates have been falling in the U.S. after peaking in the early 1980s. By 2005, the divorce rate had fallen to about 3.6 per 1,000 people, which is the lowest rate since the 1970s. And it has stayed that way in the last few years.

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Telling the kids about a divorce is one of the most stressful things parents will ever have to do. Many just avoid the difficult discussion, while one parent simply packs his or her bags and leaves. This can be devastating and confusing for a child who goes to bed with two parents and wakes up to find that one is gone.

“I don’t remember them sitting us down and saying: ‘This is what’s happening.’ I just kind of remember one parent moving to the basement and not really getting it,” says Kati, now 19, whose parents divorced when she was about 11 years old. “It was pretty clear that they weren’t together anymore because I would start meeting my mom’s boyfriend, and then I met my dad’s girlfriend. It was really confusing. I just don’t remember them sitting me down and being straight up: ‘This is what’s going on.’”

Most experts say that parents should break the news as a united front. Children shouldn’t hear about divorce from just one parent or from anyone other than their parents. It’s also important for parents to discuss beforehand what they plan to tell the children. They should agree on what information they will and won’t share about the divorce. It helps if parents have made at least temporary arrangements for the children’s living situation and visitation before breaking the news to them.

The best time to tell children is when emotions are not running high. The start of the weekend is a good time for many school-aged children because it gives them a couple of days to take in the news before they have to go back to school.

Some experts suggest that parents tell children separately to give each child a chance to express his or her feelings. All experts agree that parents should tell their children as early as possible about the divorce – ideally while both parents are still living in the marital residence.

Parents should talk to their children in age-appropriate language. Older children may be able to handle more adult conversations, but even they shouldn’t be burdened with too many personal details about the divorce. With younger children, it may simply be enough to say: “Mommy and Daddy don’t love each other anymore, but we still love you.”



North Carolina has seen a similar trend. Although the state's divorce rate is slightly higher than the national average, at four divorces per 1,000 people in 2005, the number is still down from 5.1 in 1990. North Carolina ranked 28th in the nation in 2005.

About half of today's marriages end in divorce. In 1959, nearly 80 per cent of married women celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary. By 2004, that number had dropped to about 50 per cent.

There were more than 10 million children of divorced or separated parents in 2008. Of those, more than 80 per cent lived only with their mother, while fewer than 20 per cent lived just with their father.

The average marriage that ends in divorce lasts for eight years.

Parents, mostly fathers, pay about \$40 billion a year in child support payments.

Children also need to be reassured that they aren't to blame for the divorce. Many children feel that they bear some blame for divorce and that they can do something to "fix" it. Children don't always realize how powerless they are, and taking some blame makes them feel that they have some control over the situation. It helps for parents to remind them often that the divorce is between two adults and was not caused in any way by the children. Parents should express their love for their children and make sure that the kids know that the parents loved each other at the beginning of the marriage. It's important that children don't believe they were conceived in anger.

Parents should also allow children to ask questions, even if there are no answers to some of the questions. Children naturally focus on what the divorce will mean for them. Where will they live? Where will they go to school? If one parent moves out, will they ever see that parent again? Will both parents eventually leave them?

Parents can also ask their children questions. For instance, asking children what the word "divorce" means may uncover some surprising misconceptions.

Experts suggest that parents are honest with the children about why they are getting a divorce, but the message needs to be simple. Kids don't need to know all of the personal details about their parents' relationship.

The most important message parents can send their kids is that they have two parents who will love and care for them and that the divorce is in no way their fault.

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HOW KIDS REACT



Children's reactions to divorce can be as varied as the colors of the rainbow. Two siblings may have very different emotions in response to the news.

Overwhelmed by their own emotions, parents often don't realize how deeply their children are hurting. Many times, parents mistake silence to mean that their kids aren't very affected by the divorce. Meanwhile, children who find it difficult to communicate their emotions may end up masking their feelings in more destructive behavior.

"When I was going through my divorce, I didn't know what my children were going through," said Naomi Ford Bolt, a divorce church consultant with DivorceCare, a bible-focused support group headquartered in Wake Forest, N.C. "I was so centered on myself. You're in such pain that you don't realize the children are going through the same emotions that you are, and they come out with scars that they never get rid of. My children are adults, and I can still see the scars they have from the divorce."

Children's reactions to divorce can range from the painfully obvious, such as a meltdown, to as subtle as a teenager spending more time in her room and less time with friends. Younger children may not react with words, but they might experience headaches or other physical signs.

To help children deal with their emotions, parents have to see divorce from a kid's perspective. Here are some common reactions for children of different age groups:

BABIES

Although they are too young to really grasp the concept of divorce, babies are very sensitive to their parents' feelings and can react to the tension, stress, and anger that surround the end of a marriage. They may become cranky and clingy as a result. They may complain of a sore tummy or a loss of appetite. Reassure babies with lots of hugs and cuddles, and try to maintain a calm demeanor around them.

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TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Children of this age are old enough to experience some shock, anger, and confusion when they learn of their parents' divorce. Their world revolves entirely around their family. They can understand the concept of separation but are too young to grasp the complexities of why parents get a divorce. They may react by regressing: wetting the bed, speaking in baby talk, or becoming somewhat aggressive and irritable.

They may think they are to blame for the divorce and may fear that both Mommy and Daddy will leave them some day. They need lots of reassurance that both parents still love them and that the divorce is not their fault. Try not to introduce too many changes with this age group during divorce. For instance, now might not be the best time to start toilet-training.

AGES 5-8

Children in this age group are still very dependent on their parents but are starting to socialize with friends and teachers. They can experience a whole range of emotions. Younger ones are more likely to rebound quickly and adapt to new family situations. Some experts believe that this is because they are old enough to understand that parents can be happier when they're apart but young enough to retreat into fantasy when faced with the more negative aspects of divorce.

Meanwhile, older children in this age group are some of the most vulnerable to the emotional turmoil of divorce. They can feel overwhelmed with grief and conflicted loyalties. They are old enough to understand some of the life-changing consequences of divorce but still too young to truly analyze their feelings. They can feel abandoned by the parent who has left the marriage, but they are still too young to stand up to parents and express their anger directly.



AGES 9-12

Children of this age are old enough to understand most aspects of divorce and deeply feel the loss of the family as they have known it. They might also react by struggling at school or lashing out at their parents in anger. They may feel embarrassed about the divorce, but children in this age group are better at expressing their emotions and seeking support from friends and family.

TEENAGERS

Teens can be moody and insecure even on their good days. They are in the process of developing their individuality, cultivating a social life, and learning about love and relationships. Although they are less likely to blame themselves for their parents' break-up, teens can still find divorce to be a very disruptive process. It forces them to take on adult issues before they're ready. While they often struggle with very complex emotions, teens may look at the situation in black and white terms, blaming or siding with one parent. Many look to their own burgeoning independence for comfort by distancing themselves even more from their parents.

COMMUNICATION



Allowing children to communicate their thoughts and feelings about divorce is a major step toward helping them to heal. But communication is easier said than done. It's not easy to communicate with kids in the best of times. It can seem almost impossible when everyone in the family is going through emotional turmoil.

Ask a child of any age, "How are you feeling about the divorce?" They'll probably answer, "Fine" or "I don't know."

The truth is that they probably don't know. They are deeply conflicted and confused. They worry about disappointing or hurting their parents if they reveal their true feelings. They may be a jumble of emotions and not know where to begin to express them.

Parents may want to communicate with their children but not know what to say. It can be difficult to avoid putting down the other spouse, and it can be difficult to deal with the hurtful words that children may say.

A child who isn't acting out may appear to be handling the divorce well. This same child, however, may be struggling with emotions but feel too afraid of hurting the parents to communicate those feelings. Meanwhile, a child who throws temper tantrums or wets the bed may be crying out for a way to connect with his or her parents.

OLDER KIDS

It's important that parents give their children permission to feel sad and angry, even if that means they express that anger toward the parents. Instead of asking, "How are you doing?" or "You seem to be doing okay," parents can say, "You seem sad." Another statement that might help a child to open up is, "If I was in your place, I would feel pretty upset."

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Divorcing parents need to accept that children will have mood swings and emotional outbursts. They may say things in anger, threaten to go live with the other parent, or cut parents off from their lives. It's important not to take this personally. Children need to know that it's okay to talk to either parent about their feelings, even if it means expressing anger toward their parents. Of course, then, it's up to the parents to stick to their promise and not become angry at the children. That kind of trust between a parent and a child can go a long way toward helping children to express their emotions freely.

"You just have to think on their level," says Ford Bolt. "I know my daughter said 'I hate you. I'm going to go live with dad.' She just said what she was feeling at the moment internally. It really does hurt when you're working so hard to try and be a good parent, and they came back and say things like that to you. You just have to realize where they're coming from. Their emotions are so high at the time. Sometimes, it's good to just let them go to the other parent and realize that it's not any better there."

Of course, not every conversation has to be about divorce. It's important that parents spend a bit of time with each child separately, talking to them about their day, playing with them, or going for a drive. That time together away from the spectre of divorce will help open the door to better communication.

Older children may also benefit from talking to neutral adults. Parents can suggest that an older child also talk to a counselor, therapist, family friend, or religious leader. Older children especially need a bit of space and privacy in order to blow off a bit of steam independent of their parents.

MR. GRAY'S BUNNY

This is an exercise to help young children open up about their feelings toward a parent they rarely see. It's adapted from *Helping your Kids Cope with Divorce: The Sandcastles Way* by M. Gary Neuman.

Cut out the figure of a man or woman from craft paper. Give the figure a name like Mr. or Mrs. Gray. Then, cut out the figure of a pet, such as a bunny. Tell the child the story that Mr. (or Mrs.) Gray cares for the bunny but goes away and forgets to leave enough food for the animal.

Talk to the child about what happened and why Mr. Gray forgot about the bunny. Does it mean that Mr. Gray no longer loves the bunny? Have Mr. Gray call his former spouse to ask that she (or he) take care of the bunny. How does the bunny feel? Does the bunny miss Mr. Gray even though Mrs. Gray is taking care of it?

YOUNGER CHILDREN

Young children often express themselves better through play than through conversation. Drawing a picture of a family or acting out scenes with dolls or puppets can be helpful, after which an adult can ask the child to explain what's going on in the picture or scene. How is the mommy feeling? How does the daddy feel? What about the baby? Role-playing where the child is one of the parents, and the parent plays the baby, can be very revealing. Play doesn't always have to be focused on a divorce theme, but it's a great way to open up communication by prompting young children with questions. For example: "The puppy seems sad. Can you tell me about it?"

REPETITION

Younger children especially need reassurance that life is going to be okay and that the things they valued before divorce – their parents' love, daily routine, school, friends, toys, and pets – will still be there after the divorce.

Parents need to bear in mind that they may have to answer some questions more than once. Repetition helps to reinforce the message. Children may need to hear many times that they are not at fault for the divorce.

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ROLE MODELS

Children often imitate their parents' behavior, so how parents cope with a divorce has an effect on how well the children handle it.

It can be difficult for children if a parent constantly bad-mouths his or her spouse or if the divorce takes up all of a parent's time and energy. Parents need to continue to talk to their children about the school day and not dwell solely on the details of the divorce. If the divorce becomes all-consuming, adults should consider seeking outside help, whether from a counselor or a friend. The most important thing to remember is that the strongest emotions need to be discussed with an adult, not the children.

"If you wear your emotions on your sleeve, if you're mad and angry and crying, your children are not going to get the sense of security and will feel very vulnerable, very protective of you," says Deborah Moskovich, author of *The Smart Divorce* and a divorced mother of three. "They're going to feel like they have to take care of you. You don't want to send out the message that it's the children's job to take care of the parents."

Children live very much in the present and have a hard time looking at their lives long-term. When a parent works on developing a positive outlook for the future, it helps the children to see that they, too, can find happiness despite the divorce.

PARENTING THROUGH DIVORCE



In order to help kids cope with divorce, both parties must acknowledge that they are “co-parents.” While the marriage may be over, it’s important to remember that the child is still the product of two parents and needs the love and support of both.

There are always some exceptions, such as situations where one parent entirely abandons the family or where violence, abuse, or mental illness keep a parent from remaining actively involved in the child’s life.

However, in her book *The Good Divorce*, therapist and researcher Constance Ahrons found that more than half of divorcing couples were able to maintain or develop a positive, co-operative parenting arrangement after divorce. Their kids thrived as a result.

This kind of low-conflict, respectful parenting can lay the foundation for a child’s continued healthy development after divorce.

Of course, co-parenting sounds like a great idea until there’s an argument about something, such as who will take the children for Christmas or who will attend a graduation. Parents need to acknowledge that in most cases, the other parent will be in the child’s life for many, many years to come. Sharing in the children’s lives is just a reality that must be faced from their accomplishments and tragedies to holidays, weddings, and grandchildren.

Some divorce experts suggest looking at post-divorce parenting as a business partnership. The former spouses become partners in the business of raising happy children. Business partners draw up a contract, agree to compromises, and treat each other with respect during meetings.

This means that former spouses don’t have to be best friends. In fact, Ahrons found in her research that the most effective co-parents were not friends but kept their discussions limited to issues about the children.

Successful parents, Ahrons writes, “separated out issues related to their marital relationship from those related to their parenting relationship. Their desire to provide the best situation for their children took precedence over their personal issues.”

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Parents who are married usually have a very flexible parenting arrangement. They play off each other and set shared rules on the fly. But once a couple divorces, co-parenting becomes a more difficult exercise. Still, divorce is just the end of the marriage contract. After divorce, parents can sign a new parenting contract.

PARENTING CONTRACT

If the parents are on good terms, a verbal contract may be all that's necessary to set forth a few general rules. When parents have difficulty getting along, however, it might help to create a very detailed and specific written contract with the help of an outside party, such as a counselor. This requires both parents to negotiate and compromise on everything from visitation to snacks to bedtimes. Parenting contracts can include the dates and times of visitation, length of phone calls between parents, and the topics that can be discussed between the parents and with the children, as well as subjects that are off limits.

Parents should agree on what will happen if someone's schedule changes, if a parent moves away, or if a child begins a new after-school activity. Once the agreement has been established, it shouldn't be changed without the consent of both parents. The contract can be changed as the divorce is finalized, as the children age, or when a parent moves away or remarries.

It is best to work out a temporary parenting contract as soon as a couple separates, but bear in mind that a parenting contract isn't the same thing as a custody agreement. A good parenting contract can form the basis for a divorce settlement and custody agreement down the road, however.

Shared parenting involves doing what is best for the children, but it isn't necessarily equal parenting. Even intact families don't usually split parenting duties evenly.

Here are some general guidelines that should be incorporated into any parenting contract:



- The children come first. The parents' issues with each other come second.
- Both parties are partners in parenting.
- Both parties must treat each other with respect.
- Children benefit when their parents' relationship is supportive and cooperative, even after the divorce, so this should be stipulated in the contract.
- Children have the right to be loved by both parents and have regular contact with each parent and their extended families, such as grandparents and cousins.
- Disagreements about parenting should be kept between the adults.
- Both parties should agree to never threaten to withhold child support payments or cut off the child's access to the other parent.
- Both parties should agree to never say negative things about the other parent in front of the children.
- When disagreements do come up, they need to be limited so that they don't become full-out arguments. If parents agree to talk about contentious issues in a neutral setting, such as a counselor's office, or agree to drop the topic altogether if it isn't about the kids, problems are less likely to escalate.
- Parents must understand and agree that the children's best interests are not the same as the parents' best interests.
- Each spouse is entitled to privacy after the divorce.

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A SPECIAL NOTE FOR DADS



For many men, their identity as a father is inextricably linked with their involvement with their kids. Since most divorce agreements still give primary custody to mothers, this can strain a father's relationship with his children.

Too many times, fathers feel their children begin to drift away after a separation or divorce. They pay child support but seem to have little say in their children's lives. They may start to withhold child support payments to punish their ex, only to find that their spouse cuts off access to the children. Frustrated, they withdraw even further from their kids.

But many fathers also report having a better relationship with their children after a divorce. This is usually because they have to fight harder to get access to their children and make sure the time they spend with their kids is special.

A study by the National Institute for Mental Health found that fathers who were actively involved with their children had fewer premature and accidental deaths, fewer hospital admissions, and were less likely to abuse substances.

In her research, Ahrons found that fathers' relationships with their children are established in the first two years after the divorce and usually stay that way for some years after. So, fathers who fight to stay involved with their kids within the first few years after a break-up tend to maintain long-term relationships with their children.

Her study also found that fathers' relationships with their children are often linked to the father's relationship with his ex-wife. If the parents' post-divorce relationship is full of conflict, fathers tend to be less involved with the children. If the relationship is based on cooperation and respect, fathers tend to be more involved and pay regular child support.

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NATHAN'S STORY

THE DOS AND DON'TS OF SHARED PARENTING

DO: Respect your child's relationship with the other parent.

No matter how you feel about your spouse, tell your child that it's okay to love both Mom and Dad. Help them pick out cards and presents for the other parent and encourage them to spend as much time as possible with the other parent. Experts often say that you know children are coping well if they can tell you about their time with the other parent without worrying about upsetting you.

DON'T: Bad-mouth your spouse in front of the children.

CONTINUE ↓

After his massage therapy business failed in England, Nathan moved back to his native West Virginia. He left behind his wife and five kids, ages 7-15, while he began working as a truck driver to support his family. When he returned to England at Christmas, his wife told him she wanted a divorce.

Nathan had thought about leaving and running away from the pain, but his mother told him to stick with it for his kids. He started to take antidepressants, which he said helped him. Then, he picked up the phone and called his kids.

"I was an absolute train wreck," Nathan says. "I drive a truck, and I had to stop over on the side of the road. And I cried for two hours. I couldn't stop crying. But I decided I was going to be there for my kids. I don't know how else to say it. You have to put that selfishness aside. You have to put your hurt and your pain aside. It's very painful. I couldn't stop crying for days. I actually had to take three days off work. But once you push past those feelings, your kids have to come first. I just try to support my kids and just love my kids. I call them on a regular basis, I talk to them and try to reassure them that Daddy's there for them and Mommy is there for them, too, and I'll see them as much as I can."

Nathan has noticed some changes in his kids since he separated from his wife, although he rarely talks about divorce during his regular calls to his children.

"They don't want to talk about it, and I can understand that. My 11-year old seems very distant, like he's in a childhood depression over this. My 7-year old started wetting herself again. My 15-year old and 13-year old — they're old enough to understand and handle it a bit better, but with my 9-year old, there's definitely something there that's a bit different. I'm not sure how to explain it. But [divorce] doesn't even come up whenever they're on the phone. They just say 'Hi, Dad,'" and we have a good old chat about other things. I call them to see how they're doing in school and how their friends are doing in school. I've got a really good relationship with my kids. My oldest son is 15, and he calls me his friend 'How are you doing, friend?' But I can tell that they miss me. They miss their Dad. I don't care what the world tells you, children need both their parents. I've already seen some of the effects it's having on my kids."

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Whatever the rotten thing your ex-husband did or unreasonable demand your ex-wife made, your children don't need to feel the brunt of your anger with your former spouse. While it can be tempting to rebuild your self-esteem by trying to win your child's affection at the expense of your ex, it's very damaging for children.

Children see themselves as a part of both parents. When you criticize your ex in front of your children, you're actually criticizing a piece of them. It's as powerful as telling your child, "You're a bad person." Even if they seem to take sides with you, deep down they will feel very conflicted, torn between two people they love.

DON'T: Use children as messengers or spies.



One of his hardest moments was when Nathan's 7-year old daughter asked him to watch her perform in her school play. "She said, 'Just get on a plane next Friday, and you can see me.' I just tried to reassure her that I would really, really love to be there, but Daddy just can't because Daddy is trying to take care of things on this end."

It helps that Nathan and his wife respect each other. He describes her as a good parent, and she encourages the children to call their father as often as possible.

"My wife is a very good person. She's a wonderful mother. Actually, my family, my Mom and Dad and sisters, they're really angry with her. But I say, 'Don't be angry with her. She doesn't need that. What she needs is love and support.' We're cordial toward each other. In the last few days, we've actually had some really good conversations, laughing and joking around. She encourages the kids to call. She texts me on the phone and says, 'I'm going out tonight. I told the kids to give you a call.'"

Nathan and his wife are still working out their divorce agreement, but once it's finalized, he says he's planning to move back to England to be near his children. "I refuse to be one of those deadbeat dads. No matter how painful it is, I'm going to see my kids. I'm their Dad, and I'm determined to be in their lives. You have to think of your kids. No matter what you do, you have to put your children first. If you don't, you're just being plain selfish."

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OTHER CHANGES

It can be very easy to pass messages to your spouse through your children. After all, children are supposed to do what their parents tell them. It can be even more tempting to try to find out how your spouse is living by questioning your children for information.

Children often feel caught in the middle of a tug-of-war when their parents get divorced. This can be one of the most stressful aspects of divorce for children. They want to please both of their parents and will feel very conflicted when forced into the middle of your marital dispute.



DATING

Most divorced parents will end up dating after the divorce, and many will get remarried.

It's natural to want the children to share in the new relationship. However, many experts say the rule of thumb is to wait a year after a divorce to begin dating. This allows both spouses to establish a new parenting pattern and allows children to settle in to life after the divorce.

Of course, marriages often break up because one spouse has already found a new partner. In that case, it's best not to introduce children to the new partner right away.

Many kids complain that when their parents begin dating, they never get to have any one-on-one time with them. Parents feel that they need to include their new partner in all activities to build a new family life for the children. This sort of premature family only serves to distance children from the parent, however. It's important for both parents to spend time alone with the children, even after remarrying.

If a relationship with a new partner may not be long-term, it's best to prevent the children from developing an attachment to this new person. Otherwise, when the new partner leaves, the children will experience many of the same emotions all over again that they felt after the divorce.

Experts agree that it's best to introduce children to new partners gradually and never tell children that the new person is their new Mommy or Daddy. The new partner should be referred to as a friend to the children.

Children often respond negatively to a new partner, and a parent can't expect children to immediately like him or her. Children may feel that this person threatens their hopes of their parents reuniting. They may also feel that if they bond with this new person, they're being disloyal to their other parent.

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Try to see it from your child's point of view. For example, what if you asked your 12-year old son if Dad's girlfriend came over during the boy's weekend visit with his father? On the one hand, your son won't want to lie to you, but he also won't want to betray his Dad's trust in him. He knows that the truth will probably upset you and will feel guilty about causing more problems between his parents. If he enjoyed spending time with his Dad's girlfriend, he might feel guilty about that, too.

DON'T: Treat children as confidantes or caretakers.

Children need to be children. They can't take on the role of parents for younger siblings or cope with adult problems. While you can be a support system for your children, your kids can't be a support system for you. If you find yourself struggling with the emotions of divorce, consider talking to a therapist or another adult.



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Children sometimes become upset when a parent remarries, even if they have grown to like the parent's new partner. Children resist change, especially if it seems to threaten their relationship with a parent. Parents must be patient with children in these circumstances and give them a lot of time to adjust. Perhaps living with a new partner before getting married will help.

Fourteen-year-old Aaron has seen his father divorced twice, once from his mother and once from his step-mother. Now, his father is in another relationship. While he likes his Dad's new partner, he dreads the day they say that they're getting married.

"I like Brenda like a lot," Aaron says. "She's really nice. But if they were to ever get married, I couldn't go. I know that being married only twice is a small number compared to some kids' parents each being married like five times, but they still hurt the same. I don't know why it would be so hard.... It's because I've seen it once and had my hopes up, but I don't want that to happen again — get my hopes up high and have them fall twice as low as before."

RELOCATION

Moving away can be one of the most contentious issues in divorce, but relocating to a new city can be a positive step for a parent. It can mean a better job, more money, or a bigger house. It can bring someone closer to relatives or to a new relationship. It means a fresh start. The truth is that a parent's happiness helps that person be a better parent.

But relocating presents a number of major challenges. It means that children often have to deal with complicated travel arrangements and spend their summers and holidays away from their home and friends. For older kids, it can mean giving up their sports teams and summer jobs. Younger children often feel homesick while visiting the other parent in another town.



DO: Maintain a routine.

Children crave structure and schedules. Divorce throws the old habits out the window, which is very disruptive for children. So, you need to create a new schedule as soon as possible after your separation. Try to maintain the same rules and level of discipline at both homes. For instance, it helps if you agree on a child's bedtime, even if one of you tends to be more relaxed about the rules than the other. Your child will feel more at ease with a set bedtime schedule, especially since sleeping in different beds can be difficult. It will also be more physically healthy for your child to go to bed at the same time every night.



One thing that helps children with the transition between two homes is having a special plan the night before traveling to the other parent's house, such as a movie night or a special dinner. It helps to talk to the children about what they will do at the other parent's house. It can also be comforting to plan some activities for when the children come back. It's important not to overdramatize the transition, however. Children need to feel confident that their parent will be okay while they're away.

RESOURCES

If you have to sell the family home, the custodial parent should try to stay within the same area so that children don't have to change schools. Alert the child's teachers to the divorce so that they can help with the transition and watch out for any behavioral problems.



FOR KIDS

Missing Rabbit by Roni Schotter, illustrated by Cyd Moore

On the Day His Daddy Left by Eric J. Adams and Kathleen Adams

Mama and Daddy Bear's Divorce by Cornelia Maude Spelman

Amber Brown is Feeling Blue by Paul Danziger

Why Did You Have to Get a Divorce? And When Can I Get a Hamster? by Anthony E. Wolf

FOR PARENTS

Helping Your Kids Cope With Divorce the Sandcastles Way by M. Gary Neuman

Co-Parenting After Divorce by Diana Shulman

The Good Divorce by Constance Ahrons

Child Custody Building Agreements that Work by Mimi E. Lyster

Be a Great Divorced Dad by Kenneth N. Condrell

The Divorced Dad's Survival Book: How to Stay Connected with Your Kids by David Knox and Kermit Leggett

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Divorce is Different Here



ABOUT THIS BOOK

Rosen Law Firm helps divorcing families successfully navigate one of life's most difficult chapters. All too often, the divorce process becomes confrontational, chaotic, and vindictive. Rosen Law Firm offers a structured approach that leads to certainty and finality. With our guidance, clients find the divorce process to be a time of reflection and goal-setting which allows them to learn and grow. Clients emerge from their inevitable sense of loss feeling confident they will find a fresh start while transitioning into a new phase of their lives.

Rosen Law Firm focuses on serving our clients' needs in a number of ways. Our multidisciplinary team combines its unique skills to provide a level of service that is almost impossible for any single professional to achieve. Our team is trained in and uses a variety of approaches for ending a marriage, including collaborative divorce, mediation, lawyer-led negotiation, and litigation in court when appropriate. This range of options allows our clients to choose the path to resolution that works best for their family's specific situation. The experience of divorce is frequently painful, discouraging, and filled with hostility. These feelings can be destructive to ongoing relationships between parents and their children. Recognizing this, we inspire our clients through our belief that divorce doesn't need to be a terrible experience. We provide hope as we work toward resolutions that maintain ties and dignity.

For its success in satisfying clients, even in the midst of divorce, Rosen Law Firm was awarded Metro Magazine's BEST DIVORCE LAW FIRM. Our focus on client service has also helped our firm grow into the largest of its kind in the state. Rosen Law Firm clients are regularly surveyed to ensure that our high standards of service are maintained and to determine what else we might do to improve. We are extremely proud of the trust placed in us by our clients, who regularly say they would refer us to a friend or family member.

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