

# A teen guide to divorce

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**LAW FIRM**

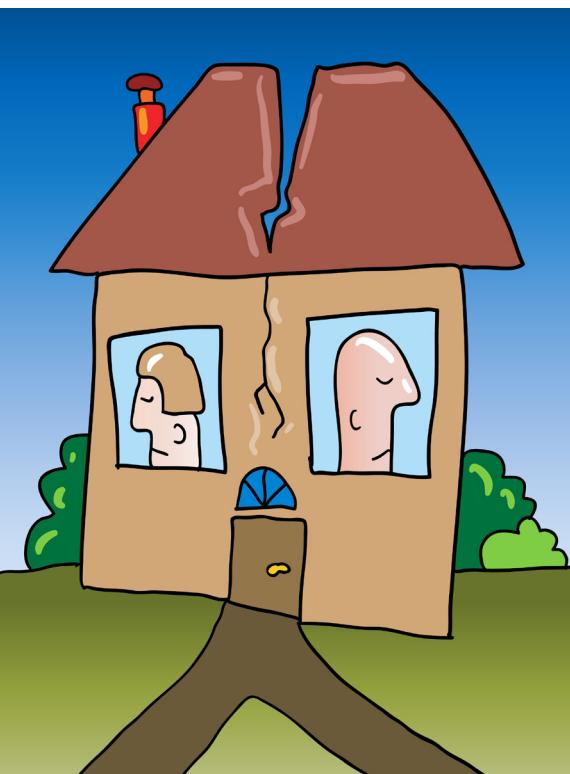
*Divorce is Different Here*



About this book



# INTRODUCTION



## No matter how old you are, divorce affects everyone in a family – even teenagers.

No matter how old you are, divorce affects everyone in a family – even teenagers.

For some teens, their parents' divorce can come as a bit of a relief. Maybe they've been fighting for years, and maybe one parent has even been physically abusive. You've known for a long time that their marriage was in trouble and the separation brings a sense of calm.

But for many other teens, the divorce comes as a total shock. Things seemed fine, like they always were. Maybe your parents were just good at keeping the problems in their marriage from the kids. Or maybe one of your parents had an affair, or is going through a midlife crisis, and so the divorce comes as a surprise to the other parent too.

Either way, since teenagers are older and more mature than young children, they have a better understanding of the implications of divorce. Teens also feel the need to shoulder a lot of responsibility, thinking that maybe they had a hand in their parents' unhappiness, or can do something to fix it. Most of all, they know that divorce will bring big changes to the family and wonder: How will it affect me?

Hopefully, your parents will give you some input into issues like where you'll live and how often you'll see both parents. But the truth is a lot of this is out of your control. Divorce is something that happens to your parents, not to you. Sure, you're affected by it – it can change your whole life. But your parents' divorce is ultimately about them, not you. You're not the reason they're splitting up, and there's little you can do to change the situation.

But as much as you can't control the end of your parents' marriage, there is a lot you can control about how you – and your parents – handle the changes that are happening to your family.

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# “WE’RE GETTING A DIVORCE”

## THE FACTS ABOUT DIVORCE

### How common is divorce?

Marriages are not lasting as long as they did in the past. In 1979, almost 80 per cent of married women celebrated their 15th wedding anniversary. By 2004, that had dropped to 57 per cent.

### Is the divorce rate going up?

The divorce rate is actually going down. In 1990, the divorce rate was 4.9. (About five out of every 1,000 people in the U.S. got a divorce.) By 2004 the divorce rate was 3.8. (About four people out of every 1,000.)

North Carolina’s divorce rate has been dropping too, from 5.1 in 1990 to 4.2 in 2004, which was about average for the entire United States.

**Average length of a marriage that ends in divorce:** 8 years

**Number of divorces in North Carolina in 2007:** More than 37,000

CONTINUE ➔

To parents, divorce signals the end of a troubled marriage. The relationship is often over by the time they separate. They still have to stay in touch to discuss important decisions about you, but they’re free to date other people, get remarried, and even have children with a new partner.

But for children, divorce is never “over,” and hearing that your parents are separating is just the beginning of a long journey. Your relationship with your parents never ends. They will always be your parents even as they grow farther apart and their lives take different paths.

Psychologists used to think that kids got over divorce pretty quickly. But now most experts believe that only thing more devastating than divorce for a child is the death of a parent. For kids, divorce is a long process and adjusting to it can take time.

That’s because the divorce is probably the biggest change you’ve ever had to deal with in your life. Everything seemed totally normal, and now it’s all falling apart. Your parents are splitting up. Maybe you have to leave your family home, your school, your friends. Will you live with your mom or your dad? What about your brothers or sisters?

It can be difficult to find a sense of peace and calm when your family life is constantly evolving. It’s not stable like it was when it was just you, your parents and maybe brothers and sisters.

There are some common changes that most kids have to deal with when their parents get divorced:



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**Number of kids living with single, separated or divorced parents in 2007:**  
Nearly 20 million. That's nearly 30 per cent of all children living in the United States. More than 3.5 million of those were teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17.

Of those, more than 7 million kids were living with divorced parents. The rest had parents that were separated, or had never been married at all.

**Remarriage:** About half of parents who get divorced will remarry, although more men remarry than women.

Average amount of time between divorce and remarriage: 2.5 years.

*Source : US Census Bureau, Family and Living Arrangements 2007*

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## CUSTODY

Custody is one of biggest issues in divorce. Most couples are able to work this out themselves without having to go to court. Even when your parents don't fight over custody, it can be hard for you to accept the arrangement. You might feel rejected if, for example, your dad decides you'll live full-time with your mom and see him on weekends. Usually, your parents are just looking out for your best interests. It's not that your dad doesn't want you to live with him. It could be that maybe your mom is staying in the family home and your dad knows it would be better for you to stay there too.

Sometimes parents can't agree on custody and then they will have to go to court. As older children, you will usually get to have a say about which parent you want to live with. This can be a really stressful situation for teens, who feel like they're caught in the middle and forced to choose between two parents. A judge will take your wishes into consideration when deciding on custody. But ultimately, the court will try to decide what's in your best interest – even if it's not exactly what you wanted.

In most cases, children end up living with their mother and seeing their father for regular visits, like on weekends or during the summer. This can be a challenge to keep in touch with your dad if you're suddenly not seeing him every day like you used to. It might mean you have to change around your schedule a lot. For instance, maybe you're used to hanging out with your friends on weekends and now you have to go out of town to see your dad.

## FINANCES

Maybe you have a part-time job and have some of your own spending money, but chances are you're still dependent on your parents for a lot, and so their money issues become your money issues.



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Divorce can be expensive. Parents have to hire lawyers, divide property, bank accounts, credit cards. Often one parent has to pay child support to the other to help cover your expenses. Maybe your parents have to sell the family home and both move to some place smaller to save money, or one of them moves in with your grandparents. Maybe your mom had previously stayed home to raise you and now has to go back to school or get another job to make ends meet.

This can usually mean more responsibility for you, like cooking dinner, cleaning the house, or looking after younger brothers and sisters. For many teens divorce means you have to grow up faster than you might like.

## DATING AND REMARRIAGE

Your parents are probably going to start dating again at some point. Seeing your parents dating can be a shock because it ends your hope that maybe they can get back together.

It can be weird for teens to see their parents back on the dating scene, because it's the time in your life when you're probably starting to think about relationships. It's strange to know you're going out on a date the same night as your mom. But it's healthy for her to be able to get away from the pain and grief of divorce and start searching for a new partner to share her life.

Maybe one of your parents has already found a new partner and that's the reason for the divorce. That can be a really awkward situation because you might feel this new partner is to blame for the end of your parents marriage. But the reasons for the divorce are between your parents, and chances are that you don't know all the details.

You don't have to treat this new partner like a "new mom" or "new dad." They won't ever replace your parents. But be open to this new person in your life. You may like them more than you thought you could.

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# AARON'S STORY (15 YEARS OLD)



When my mom and dad divorced, I don't remember them ever discussing this with me, but they might have. All I remember is one day I saw a bunch of boxes around our house. My mom's stuff and my stuff wasn't in the house, I assumed it was in the boxes.

I live with my mom and go to my dad's on Friday's and come back either Sunday or Saturday, usually Saturday. Up until about two years ago, I was OK with the agreements. That all changed with, you know, the 'Becoming a teenager' and that kind of stuff parents say. I started feeling like I never got enough time with my dad.

Because I never really spent time with my dad, the relationship is kind of awkward and odd. He treats me like I'm a nine-year-old who is going to get lost if he wanders like ten feet away or is like 20 feet in front of him on a bike trail. And I'm fifteen and have my permit. It's time for him to stop doing that. I don't know, but it's real annoying.

My basketball games are a different scenario. Sometimes he comes, sometimes he doesn't. Usually, he doesn't, because of work, or it's too icy, or whatnot. In the past I would get really upset when he didn't come. But that stopped last year at the beginning of my eighth-grade year. I was done crying over him not coming. Now, I don't really even tell him that I have a game. One, because I don't want to hear his bull---t apology. Two, it just for some reason gets my hopes up higher.

A year and a half ago, my stepmom started having problems with alcoholism. He divorced her. I was happy, but yet upset. I was happy because I never liked her. It's not that she was like the evil stepmother like in Cinderella. She was nice, but I didn't like her. Now my dad and his girlfriend, Brenda, have been living together. I like Brenda like a lot. She's really nice. But if they were to ever get married, I couldn't go. Not because of like: "You're too young to go" or something. I mean like I couldn't bring myself to go.

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## TIDBITS

Famous people whose parents divorced when they were teenagers:

- \* Rhianna – 14
- \* Ashton Kutcher – 14
- \* Stephen Spielberg - 16
- \* Johnny Depp – 15
- \* Nicolas Cage – 12
- \* Hilary Swank – 15
- \* Denzel Washington–14
- \* Rachel Weisz - 15

After going to [my dad's first remarriage] and after years of thought, I decided that if he were to get married again that I wouldn't go. I couldn't go through with it again, no matter what. Even if he begged.

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 just is. Not to sound like a seven-year-old, though. 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.

I don't talk to my dad about problems or anything. Actually, I don't really talk to my mom about them either unless it just blurts out in front of my mom. What I do is sometimes talk to professional counsellors in one-on-one chat rooms, because it's anonymous. Sometimes I talk to my younger cousin, who is very understanding. Occasionally, my older cousin, and besides that, my friends.

## Common Reactions to Divorce

Everyone has their own reaction to divorce. Some teens try to spend as little time at home as possible, preferring to spend all their time with their friends. Others want to stay closer to home. Some find they can't concentrate at school and stop doing homework, while others throw themselves into their studies. Some get angry and lash out. Others try to pretend like the divorce is no big deal.

The truth is divorce is a big deal, and all of those reactions are normal. There are unhealthy reactions to divorce, like getting into drugs or alcohol, running away from home, having sex when you're not ready. But being angry and confused are natural reactions to divorce. As a teenager, you're at a stage of your life when you're trying to test boundaries, assert your independence, and figure out where you fit into the world. So worrying about how the divorce affects you isn't selfish behaviour, it's actually pretty common.

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There are some other common reactions. They might not all apply to you, but they're good to think about:

## BETRAYAL

For many teens, home was always a safe and comfortable place. No matter what other turmoil is going on in your life – pressure at school, fights with your friends – your family was always your rock. Now home is where your biggest problems are and your parents are all wrapped up in their own emotional turmoil. You might even have to leave the home you've known all your life. This can shake the foundation under your feet and leave you feeling betrayed by your parents.

Often marriages break up because one parent has cheated on the other. That can feel like a betrayal too. But it's important to understand that your parents still love you and that they're not doing this to hurt you. Even if your mom cheated on your dad, this is something between your parents. She didn't cheat on you, she is still your mom and she still loves you.

## GUILT

While most teens know that they aren't the reason their parents broke up, they can't help but feel that they were somehow at fault - especially if your parents sometimes fought over you. It bears repeating: The divorce is not your fault. Nothing you could have done would have changed what happened to your parents' relationship. There is probably little you can do to fix their broken marriage. A couple who has a strong relationship can weather any of the challenges their kids throw at them. If they had a good marriage, they probably wouldn't be disagreeing about you in the first place.

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## DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Many teens feel like they are forced to choose between their parents. This can happen when parents are fighting over custody. But it can also happen if your parents get remarried. And chances are at least one of them will. It can make you feel bad for your mom to know that your dad is dating again.

Even as you grow up, you may feel like you constantly have to choose between your parents, or play mediator at special events at holidays, graduation, weddings. If your parents can't be in the same room together without fighting, you might not even bother inviting them to see your band concert, or basketball game because you'll be too worried about how they'll act when they get there.

## CONFUSED ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Adolescence is a time when you're starting to look for independence, test boundaries, find out a bit more about who you are. You're starting to think about romantic relationships. It's probably a time when you look to your parents as role models for how a relationship should be. That can be tough when their marriage is breaking down and they're probably the least attentive to your needs because they're all wrapped up in their own emotions.

It's easy to look at your parents' problems and question your own ability to be in a committed relationship. But your parents' marriage is theirs and theirs alone. You make your own choices in life and you have plenty of time to make them. Just because your parents' marriage failed doesn't mean you'll fail at relationships. Many children of divorce say their parents' problems made them work harder on their own romantic relationships. At your age, you have lots of time to try on different relationships and see if they fit. If one doesn't work out, it doesn't mean you're destined to fail at love.

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# MISTAKES YOUR PARENTS MAKE



When you were younger, your parents probably seemed all-powerful. They controlled everything in your life: From what you ate, to your clothes, to what time you went to bed. Now that you're a bit older and have a bit more independence, you've probably figured out that your parents are only human.

And humans sometimes make mistakes.

Parents going through the turmoil of divorce don't always recognize that they're hurting their children. They often think that teenagers are so tuned out they think you don't notice, or don't care, about what's going on in their marriage.

"Sometimes parents will do things that are completely uncool with their kids because they're going through basically a grief process," said Jennifer Coleman, Life Transition Coach with Rosen Law Firm. "They're suffering a relationship loss. They're not always thinking clearly. I don't think any parent for the most part would ever do anything willingly to hurt their kids, but sometimes when they're caught up in their own pain, they relate to them in ways that can be damaging."

Here are some mistakes that parents often make:

## BADMOUTH THE OTHER PARENT

Unfortunately, one of the most common ways for parents to get back at each other after a divorce is to do it through their kids. This can be your mom reminding you every chance she gets that your dad cheated on her. Or maybe your dad complains about how much child support he pays your mom. That's not fair and it's hurtful for you since you love both your parents. It can hit at a deeper level too - maybe you see some of your dad in yourself and when your mom points out negative things about your dad, it can feel like she's rejecting you too.

Your parents might be insecure about how much you love them and want to try to gain your loyalty by turning you against the other parent. But their behaviour can leave you struggling with your loyalties even more.

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## USE YOU AS A MESSENGER AND A SPY

Your parents' marriage may be over, but their relationship isn't totally finished the minute they file for divorce. Usually there are still some unfinished feelings. Maybe one parent didn't even want to get divorced and still wants to get back together. Chances are, they're still curious about the other parent and want to keep tabs on them. And they'll often use their kids to send those messages.

This can mean your dad asking you questions about who your mom has been dating. Or your mom saying: "Tell your father he's late with the child support payment." These are conversations they need to have with each other. But they might not want to confront the other person directly, so they try to go through you.

It's kind of like how you might be tempted to read your ex-boyfriend's e-mail, or ask his friends who he's been hanging out with. You want to find out what's going on with them, but you don't want to ask them yourself, so you do it through other people.

But as the child, you don't want to be in the middle of your parents' problems, and you might feel like you're betraying your mom if you spill the beans on her to your dad. This is a no-win situation for you.

## BRIBERY

Another way that parents try to win their kids' loyalty is by buying expensive gifts or trying to be your best friend. For instance, maybe your dad knows you have a curfew at your mom's, so he lets you stay out as late as you want.

Sometime experts call these parents "born-again parents" or "Disney Dads" because think they need to buy your love. Usually, they're insecure, and think if they try to set rules and act like a strict parent, you'll reject them.

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"There is a problem where the parents are afraid to parent," said Deborah Moskovich, author of *The Smart Divorce* and a divorced mom of three teens. "They're afraid if they're the custodial parent, my child might not want to live with me. Or if they're the non-custodial parent they think my child might not want to visit. They're afraid to set rules and guidelines."

The thing is that it's tempting to play into their insecurities because you get stuff out of it. You know your parents are just trying to buy your love, but you really wanted that Xbox 360. It's easy to manipulate your parents this way. But is that expensive gift really worth it, if the real reason behind it is that your dad wanted to win out over your mom? It might just leave you with more guilt when you know you're manipulating your parents, and putting yourself in the middle of their games.

### TREAT YOU LIKE A CONFIDANTE

On the other hand, parents can sometimes confide in you too much about how much the other parent hurt them, or how hard their life is now after the divorce. They're probably feeling sad and lonely need a shoulder to cry on. You're the closest person in their life. Being a teenager, they think you're old enough to have mature adult conversations about your parents. But no kid, no matter how old you are, wants to hear all the details of their parents' relationship. These are conversations your parents need to have with other adults in their life, or a therapist. You can be there to love and support your parents, but you can't shoulder all the responsibility of fixing their unhappiness.

### DON'T VISIT OR CANCEL VISITS

Sometimes one parent tries to control the other one by not respecting the visitation schedule. This can be your dad not coming to pick you up for the weekend, or your mom making plans that keep you from seeing your dad.

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A teen guide to divorce  
Mistakes Your Parents Make

It can be really hard when your parents can't respect your schedule. It can feel like they don't love you, or don't want to see you.

Usually parents are doing this out of their own insecurity. Maybe they still have feelings for the other parent, and it's hard to see that person every time they come to pick you up. Maybe they want to punish the other parent, so they do this through their kids. Maybe they feel like they're not your "real" parent anymore because you don't live with them all the time. They can feel like you're slipping away from them and they don't know how to handle it.

Visitations can feel awkward for you, but they're also awkward for your parents and some people react to that by just avoiding the situation. It's unfair and immature, but parents aren't always as grown up as they should be. They don't mean to reject you, but it can still feel like rejection.

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# KAYLA'S STORY (14 YEARS OLD)



I've been going through my parents' divorce for three years.

At first I was going to live with my mom, and then my dad started talking about things that my mom did that made him unhappy and a bunch of other things that made me dislike my mom. So I told my mom I wanted to live with my dad and she went to her room and cried. Then she told me later she didn't want me living with my dad.

My dad told me it would be OK if I wanted to live with my mom. But then he turned on me. When I told him I didn't care who I wanted to live with anymore, he told me that he had spent a bunch of money trying to get me and that if I lived with my mom again, I could never live with him if things got bad.

Mom has had her share of crap too. She told me that if I lived with dad then she would have to move out of the house and live with her parents because she wouldn't have enough money anymore. My Mom even told me once that she would have killed herself a long time ago if it wasn't for me.

I'm not supposed to know what has gone on or has been going on, 14 or not, I'm the child in the divorce and I shouldn't even be in the middle.

The thing about living with my dad is I'd have to go to a large school. He's in a big city while I'm in a little town right now with my mom. Large Schools scare me now. I'm comfortable here with my Mom, most of the time. I also have friends here, my counsellor is the best in the state, my school is dear to me, no matter how many posers, jerks, or sex-seeking boys are there.

I feel like whatever person I choose, it'll make everyone think I'm selfish and I'll feel selfish. It makes me feel stupid.

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Another thing is that I feel like my Dad is fickle. He hated cats his whole life. Then after the divorce he got a cat. He had been out of love with my mom for 10 years before he filed the divorce and he already had someone in mind whom he liked. She has a cat too. He acts very nice to his girlfriend. I've never seen him snap at her. Of course he snaps at me for the littlest of things sometimes.

Sometimes I wonder if he does this because I'm acting like my Mom or something. He said he doesn't want me to become like Mom. I'm tired of trying not to be one or the other. It stresses me out. I just get tired of trying and if I notice that I'm doing something like my Mom (or my Dad) then I'll see about correcting it later if it becomes a habit.

I worry myself sick with it whenever I do think about it, thus I try to shove it to the back of my head and deal with it another time.

I constantly think about graduating and moving out. It may sound selfish and I would never do it, but I've thought about moving up north and not giving them my phone number for a few months, just to get away. But I don't think I'd have the heart to.

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# How To TALK To YOUR PARENTS



Part of being a teenager is testing boundaries and so your parents are constantly trying to set rules to keep you from going too far. But guess what? Parents need boundaries too. Sometimes they don't know how to set their own boundaries with their teenagers - especially when they're going through a divorce. So it's up to you to tell your parents what you need from them and to be clear about what you're comfortable, and not comfortable, doing for them.

## BE HONEST

Tell your parents honestly how you're feeling about the divorce, and how they're handling it. Give your parents a chance to be open and honest with you. Your parents are hurting too and so it's better not to start the conversation by blaming or attacking them. Rather than saying "You did this..." try starting a conversation with "This situation makes me feel..." You don't have to use those exact words, but talk about how you're feeling and what you're going through, rather than trying to put everything back on them. As much as you're hurting, your parents are hurting too and it will help them to know that you still love and support them.

## IT'S BETTER NOT TO KNOW

While it's OK to ask questions about how the divorce will affect your family, you might be tempted to ask a bunch of questions to try to figure out why your parents split. You want to analyze the situation and go through all the reasons and make sense of them. But really, the divorce is between your parents and it's not important for you to know all the details of what went wrong.

The same way that you might want your parents to give you a bit of space and privacy, they need some privacy too. Ultimately, the important thing isn't why they split up, but how they're handling the separation and divorce.

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## SET YOUR LIMITS

Be clear with your parents about what you will and won't do for them. It's OK to set boundaries and refuse to put yourself in the middle. It can be hard to stand up to your parents. But it will help you and them if you do. It will also be more powerful coming directly from you, rather than asking the other parent to speak up on your behalf.

This means telling them clearly that you won't relay any more messages for them, or gossip about one parent to another. If your mom has something to say to your dad, she should tell him herself, she shouldn't do it through you. Explain to your parents how much it hurts you to be put in the middle. How you love both of your parents and you don't want to choose between them, or hear negative things about either of them.

It might not stop your parents from putting you in the middle, but it is important to say how you feel and to let your parents be aware so they can realize that what they're doing is hurting you. You might have to repeat this message a few times. Parents can be a bit like pets sometimes: You have to train them in how to behave.

If one of your parents is constantly going over intimate details of the divorce with you, they probably need someone to talk to. That person should be another adult - hopefully a neutral and objective adult. If you think one of your parents is having a really hard time with the break-up, suggest that they get help and talk to a counsellor, or an adult a family member or friend. Tell them that you're here to love and support them, but they need more advice than you're able to give.

## ON THE OTHER HAND

Maybe your issue is that you don't know what to talk about with your parents at all. This is pretty common when you're spending time with the parent you don't live with - for most teens that's their dad.

It can be really strange and awkward to have to "visit" one of your parents, especially if they live in a new home, or with a new partner. You might not know what to talk about.



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You can start with some small stuff. Just tell your dad what's been going on in your life. What's been going on at school? Are there any classes you enjoy? Or maybe you're struggling with one of them. Are you involved in any activities, like sports or music or art? Have you seen any good movies, or started playing any new video games?

Not every conversation has to be deep and meaningful. Mostly your parents just want to stay connected to your life.

But don't be afraid to talk about the deep stuff too. Even if you no longer live with your dad, he's still your parent and should be there to help you answer the tough questions in your life. You can also ask him the hard questions about how he's dealing with his new life, or his new home.

Remember that as weird as these conversations can seem to you, your parents might be more nervous than you are wondering what you guys are going to talk about.

It's also important to keep some regular contact with the parent you don't live with. This can be regular phone calls, even for just 15 minutes, or by e-mail or webcam or text message. Think about it: You text or e-mail your friends dozens of times a day. You can probably find a few minutes to text your dad, just to say hi or tell him what's new. Parents appreciate that more than you know and you'll probably feel good about it too.

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# KATI'S STORY (19 YEARS OLD)



I have a pretty unique situation. My parents decided to stay in the same house, so my mom was living in the basement and my dad kept the master bedroom upstairs. I'm pretty sure it was to do with finances.

I don't remember them sitting us down and saying: This is what's happening. But it was pretty clear that they weren't together anymore because I would start meeting my mom's boyfriend. Then I met my dad's girlfriend.

It was confusing. I didn't really know what was going on. I found it a little embarrassing too, because when my friends were over, I'd just have to answer all these questions and it was a situation that I didn't really understand.

It was sad at the beginning, but I saw the fighting and how they weren't getting along at all. It was really hard when they were together because they were really verbally abusive to each other. Their communication totally broke down and they'd just start yelling at each other and going crazy and nothing was resolved. So I didn't really like them together. They're both happier apart and that's really what counts.

My mom had a few different boyfriends. They never measured up to my dad, obviously. My dad's girlfriend, at first I didn't like her at all because she was this new woman in my dad's life. But I warmed up to the idea and figured it was better. Less fighting. Less drama.

My mom was jealous of my dad's girlfriend sometimes and then she'd start going on about how my dad this, my dad that. She'd go through his stuff when he wasn't in the house, like snooping and paranoid and jealous. I would get really angry and really upset and say: "Please, stop it. This is hurting me too. If you need to know something, just ask him." I was old enough that I realized to say that to her.

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I've always been kind of a daddy's girl and it's still there for me now that they're not together. I'll get into a fight with my mom, she's driving me nuts, she's on my ass all day. So I'll go to my dad for advice because he does know her and he tries to stay neutral. He'll talk to her about it and try to work something out without me, or tell me this how we should do it. But my mom is a little bit fiery about it to, so it's complicated.

I wish they would've just been more straight-up with us, like clearer boundaries for their relationship. They probably didn't have to live under the same roof for so long. My dad finally moved out last year. They didn't have to pretend to be friendly. For someone who is 12, that's really confusing. Why put everyone through that? They hate each other, but now they're getting along because there are clearer boundaries now that my dad lives here and my mom lives there.

It helped just knowing that divorce is pretty common these days. It's not that big of a deal, especially when they were both so miserable. It's not that bad of a thing for them to not be together. To know that they actually do love you and it's to do with their relationship and not all of your relationship. To know that they separately love you, whether they're together or apart. They both have their place: you go to your dad for this, you go to your mom for that. You're still a family.

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If you're really not comfortable talking to your parents, then you should find another adult to confide in. Even if you are able to talk to your parents, it can be good to talk to someone who isn't part of your family to get a fresh perspective.

A good place to find someone is in your school. Most schools have guidance counsellors and they're trained on how to talk to teens about a whole bunch of issues. They can also refer you to outside counsellors. You can also ask your parents to help you find a therapist to talk to, especially if you're really struggling with your feelings over the divorce.

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*Divorce is Different Here*



About this book

If you really don't think you need a professional counsellor, try to find another adult in your life to talk to, like a teacher, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, or one of the parents of your friends. The key is for this person to be a neutral third party and someone whose opinion you respect.

You can also talk about your feelings to your friends. Maybe one of your friends is also the child of divorce and knows what you're going through. Your friends are there to support you and not to judge you.

#### OTHER THINGS YOU CAN DO:

Keep a journal. You can write down all your feelings, or just write about your day. It helps sometimes to get your feelings out on paper and you can look back on it years from now and see how far you've come. If you like writing, you can also try writing short stories or plays.

If writing isn't your thing, find an activity you enjoy. Maybe you're really interested in art and can express yourself better through drawing than by talking. Or perhaps you're great at basketball and can work out all your frustrations with a bit of exercise on the court. Even just going for a walk can help to clear your head. The point is to find a positive outlet to help you work out all your emotions.

**Talk to your pets.** Sure, your dog doesn't understand what you're saying and can't offer advice, but he's probably a good listener and he won't judge you no matter what you say to him. A lot of people find comfort in their pets. If you don't have a pet, maybe you have a stuffed animal, or a familiar object like a book or video game that brings you some comfort.

**Go online.** A lot of teens go on the Internet to find communities of other teenagers where they can share their stories anonymously and get some feedback. There are some good websites listed in the resources chapter at the end of this guide. However, just be careful about how much personal, identifying information you share online. It's great to find support on the Internet, but you also have to be safe and protect yourself.

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# RESOURCES

## Books: Non-fiction

**The Divorce Helpbook for Teens** by Cynthia MacGregor

**Teens and Divorce** by Gail B. Stewart

## Books - Fiction

**My Not-So-Terrible Time at the Hippie Hotel** by Rosemary Graham. A novel about 14-year-old Tracy, who is dragged by her dad to a summer retreat for teens and their divorcing parents. It's based on the author's own experience when she was 12.

**Twilight** by Stephenie Meyer - This popular teen vampire series follows Bella, a Junior who moves across the country to stay with her dad after her mom remarries. It's mostly about Bella's relationship with the mysterious Edward Cullen, but it's also about her relationship with her mom and dad.

## Movies

**The Squid and the Whale** – Based on the director's personal experience, it follows two brothers through their parents' divorce.

**The Sisterhood of the Travelling Pants** – Four best friends go away for the summer, but stay in touch through a pair of jeans that magically fits all of them. The characters include Carmen, who learns her dad is getting remarried and feels like an outcast in his new family.

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## TV



*The Secret Life of an American Teenager*

**Once and Again** – This series has been off the air for a few years, but you can still find it on DVD. It was about a mother in the middle of a divorce and her romance with a divorced dad. It also focused a lot on the pair's teenage children and how they deal with their parents' divorce.

## ONLINE

**Teenlineonline.org** – Teens helping teens. Not specifically for divorce, this is a great online community, with discussions on everything from relationships to family. There is also a phone line and live chat, where you can get advice from other teens.

**Billsarena.com** - Teen Bill Sears started the website to deal with his parents divorce. It's been a bit quiet lately, but it still has an active message board and blog.

**Kidshealth.org** - This site has a separate site for teens, including a guide to on how to deal with divorce.

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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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