

# Divorce



In the United States, divorce occurs in approximately 50% of marriages within their first 15 years. These rates have remained fairly consistent during the past decade and clearly impact a large number of children. Children from divorced families or of single parents display higher rates of psychiatric disorders, academic difficulties, and behavioral problems.

The impact of divorce on children varies greatly. Some progress has occurred with regard to reducing the stress of divorce on children, such as improved efforts at co-parenting through parent education and courtroom legislation.

Divorce affects many aspects of children's lives. It may cause serious financial stress for one or both parents, can result in children's decreased contact with one or both parents, and may require children to move from their original homes. Children may need to transfer schools, entailing loss of contact with their peer group. Children sometimes blame themselves for their parents' divorce. They may exhibit significant signs of depression or anxiety due to the uncertainty of divorce. They observe their parents in a compromised position, often being exposed to increased levels of anger, stress, or depression on the part of one or both parents. Children often experience feelings of abandonment, anger toward their parents, and a loss of respect for their parents.

Fortunately, there are many opportunities to reduce the negative impacts of divorce on children. While divorce is not the preferred course of action when considering children's

well-being, divorce can present opportunities that help children achieve success in their future relationships.

## Recommendations

**1. Prior to informing children about a divorce, both parents should educate themselves.** They are encouraged to do some reading and to find some common ground in order to present the decision to their children. It is important that children do not feel blamed for the divorce. It is also important that parents are honest but not to the point of revealing information that is inappropriate for children to hear or hard for them to understand. Divorce always creates extreme difficulties; finding a balance among openness, honesty, and the negativity that parents may be feeling toward one another can be very challenging. It is imperative that children's best interests are kept in mind at all times.

**2. Encourage children to talk about their feelings regarding the divorce.** Help them to be willing to talk about their fears and anxieties.

**3. Involve children in individual and child-based psychotherapy.** Find a therapist with an expertise in the area of divorce who can understand your child's experiences.

**4. Many children benefit from involvement in group therapy.** Many schools have ongoing group therapy for children who come from divorced families.

**5. If possible, keep routines the same.** Divorce can lead to families moving to different neighborhoods and homes, as well as cause children to transfer schools. It is very important to try to keep as much consistency in children's lives as possible.

**6. Provide children with opportunities to spend time with other family members who can support them.** Such a support

system can provide some consistency and stability during this time of uncertainty. This system is most helpful when it includes close family members from both the mother's and father's sides of the family.

**7. Find a balance between what you choose to share and not to share with your children about your emotional experience of the divorce.** For example, if you are significantly depressed or very angry, it is not helpful for your children to see the full extent of these emotions. Your children should not be your therapist, nor should you burden them with these concerns. At the same time, if you act as though the divorce has not impacted or affected you at all, then this display will most likely be disingenuous and will not help your children adjust. Acknowledging that you may be feeling angry or depressed about the divorce is acceptable and important. Keep in mind that it's detrimental for your children to feel as if they are being put in the middle of a conflict between their parents.

**8. Read, and encourage your children to look at websites and books about divorce.** Recommended material is listed below.

## Websites

[The Effects of Divorce on Children and How to Cope:](#) Describes the impacts of divorce on children.

Help Guide: Provides strategies that can help kids deal with divorce.

[Kids Health:](#) Offers ideas for talking to kids about divorce.

[University of Missouri:](#) Provides information for teachers about dealing with divorce in the classroom.

# Books

Ahrons, C. (1994). *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together When Your Marriage Comes Apart*. HarperCollins Publishing: New York, NY. (Provides useful information to guide families through the transitions that divorce entails.)

Emery, R. (2004). *The Truth About Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions So You and Your Children Can Thrive*. Viking Adult. (A helpful guide on how to work with an ex-spouse to make decisions regarding the children.)

Neuman, M.G. and Romanowski, P. (1999). *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. Random House. (Offers valuable strategies to increase communication between parents and children going through divorce.)

Schab, L.M. (2008). *The Divorce Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Move Beyond the Break Up*. Instant Help Books. (Designed for teens to help them better cope with divorce.)

Trafford, A. (1992). *Crazy Time: Surviving Divorce and Building a New Life*. HarperCollins Publishers: New York, NY. (Includes strategies for making it through a divorce successfully and for how to begin a new life.)

Winchester, K. and Beyer, B. (2001). *What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids*. Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.: Minneapolis, MN. (Helps to explain the process of divorce to elementary-school age children.)