


Parenting and Divorce

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Parenting and Divorce

- ◆ Approximately half of all marriages end in divorce
 - ◆ 40% of children in the United States have divorced parents
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- ◆ Divorce is **STRESSFUL!**
- ◆ Divorce is a loss.



Divorce is a loss for parents

- ◆ Dreams
 - ◆ A sense of order and peace
 - ◆ Family structure
 - ◆ Support
 - ◆ Income
 - ◆ Freedom
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Divorce is a loss for kids

- ◆ Where a child lives
 - ◆ With whom she lives
 - ◆ Whom he tells the events of his day
 - ◆ Freedom
 - ◆ Friends
 - ◆ Security
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How do children fare?

- ◆ Age
 - ◆ Gender
 - ◆ Temperament
 - ◆ Parental functioning
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Infants and toddlers

Loss of developmental
accomplishments


Angry and frustrated

Fear, clinging


Stop exploring




Infants and toddlers

- ◆ Keep consistent routine
 - ◆ Drop-off and pickup times, caregivers
 - ◆ Transitional objects
 - ◆ Reduce parental hostility
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Preschool/ Kindergarten

- ◆ Loss of developmental milestones (e.g. thumb-sucking, bedwetting)
 - ◆ Confusion about divorce and its impact
 - ◆ Fears of abandonment/ separation anxiety
 - ◆ Anger and frustration
 - ◆ Withdrawal
 - ◆ Sleep
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Preschool/ Kindergarten

- ◆ Reassure
 - ◆ Listen
 - ◆ Be consistent
 - ◆ Reduce parental hostilities
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Elementary school

- ◆ Sadness, anxiety,
- ◆ Decline in school performance
- ◆ Physical complaints
- ◆ Attempt to reunite parents
- ◆ “Take care” of parents


Elementary School

- ◆ Allow them to love you both
 - ◆ Avoid criticizing the other parent
 - ◆ Reassure
 - ◆ Be consistent
 - ◆ Reduce parental hostilities
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Preteens

- ◆ Sadness, loneliness, insecurity
 - ◆ Attempt to undo the divorce
 - ◆ Take sides
 - ◆ Feel and express anger
 - ◆ Decline in school performance
 - ◆ Premature sexual behavior
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Preteens

- ◆ Allow discussion of feelings
 - ◆ Allow child to love both parents
 - ◆ No pressure to choose sides
 - ◆ Reduce parental hostilities
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Adolescents

- ◆ Withdrawal
 - ◆ Angry and rebellious behavior
 - ◆ Sexually active
 - ◆ Drugs and alcohol
 - ◆ Decline in school performance
 - ◆ May assume adult role
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Adolescents

- ◆ Open and honest communication
 - ◆ Avoid relying on child as emotional support
 - ◆ Reduce parental hostilities
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Gender

- ◆ In the first few years, boys tend to have more difficulties in academic and social functioning
- ◆ Girls who appear to adjust well may have adjustment difficulties later

Temperament

- ◆ Easygoing
- ◆ Reactive

Parental functioning

- ◆ Parents often experience guilt, grief, anxiety, depression, anger
 - ◆ While these symptoms are expectable, be aware of their impact on the child
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Parental Functioning (continued)

- ◆ Be careful about whose needs are being met


Conflict

- ◆ Hostility
- ◆ Criticism
- ◆ Choosing sides
- ◆ Playing the victim
- ◆ Keeping secrets
- ◆ Attacks against a parent is an attack against the child


Destructive Parental Behaviors

- ◆ Drinking, drugs
 - ◆ Speaking ill of other parent
 - ◆ Fighting in front of children
 - ◆ Introducing a new partner too soon
 - ◆ Asking child to keep secrets
 - ◆ Mismanaging money
 - ◆ Taking anger out on children
 - ◆ Being unpredictable
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Destructive Parental Behaviors

- ◆ Asking children to be the messenger
 - ◆ Negatively comparing the child to the ex-spouse
 - ◆ Withholding events from other parent
 - ◆ Using the child as a spy
 - ◆ Using children as pawns
 - ◆ Withholding visitation
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Results of Conflict

- ◆ Increase in stress
 - ◆ Less safety
 - ◆ Less security
 - ◆ Loss of self-esteem
 - ◆ Decreased happiness
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Communicating

- ◆ Using “I” statements
 - ◆ Watch distorted self-talk
 - ◆ Repeat back to show understanding
 - ◆ Listen
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Communication Checklist

- ◆ Explain the divorce in understandable language
 - ◆ Reassure the child of your love
 - ◆ Convey encouragement and hope
 - ◆ Encourage discussion of emotions
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Self Care

- ◆ Support network
 - ◆ Professional help
 - ◆ Exercise
 - ◆ Stay involved
 - ◆ Enjoy your kids
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Co-parenting

- ◆ It's a choice
- ◆ It's a commitment
- ◆ It lasts forever