

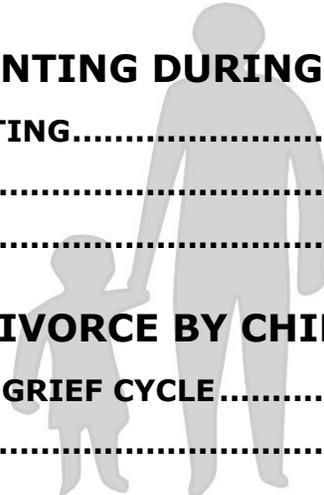
PARENTING AFTER DIVORCE

A COMPLETE GUIDE

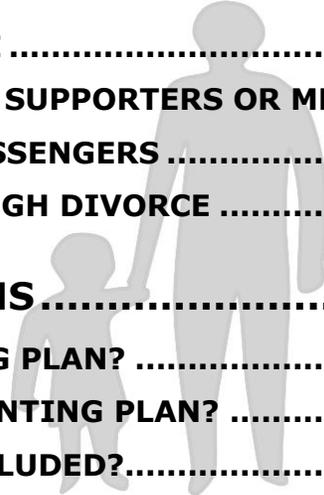


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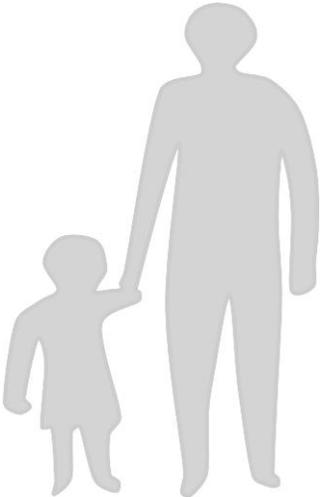
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1

RELEVANCE OF DIVORCE TO CHILDREN

There are few adults and parents who are not aware of the challenges and potential difficulties that divorce imposes on children. There are literally thousands of books written about the impact of divorce on kids, both from a positive and a negative perspective. The good news out of this rather depressing research is that parents, through their actions both towards their children as well as towards each other, have a huge influence on how children will adjust to the divorce both in the short and long term.

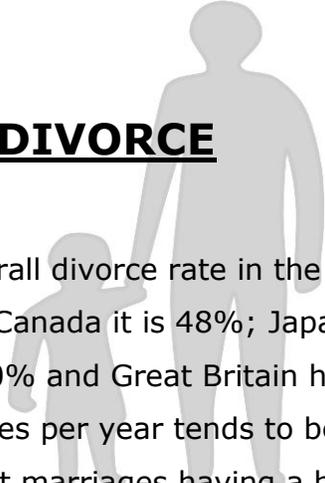
No parent going through a divorce needs the added stress, anxiety and worry of how their actions are negatively affecting their children. By understanding how to minimize the negative aspects of divorce for children, knowing the typical responses of children to divorce, and working with the other parent to maintain the loving, nurturing environment that a child needs through the divorce, parents can help children to adjust to their new lifestyle. Stressing parent co-operation and communication with regards to raising the child or children is critical, but so is being civil, respectful and positive towards the other parent with regards to their abilities to be a wonderful Mom or Dad to the child.

Many parents struggle to help their children cope with the emotional pain of divorce and learning to live with Mom and Dad in two separate homes. Very few children, or parents for that matter, find that the time they get to spend

together is enough. Mom and Dad working together to accommodate each other schedules and the schedules and needs of the kids will help in addressing some of the inequity that is inherent in co-parenting through a divorce and after.

Divorce is no longer an uncommon occurrence in most countries of the world. While countries in North America tend to have higher divorce rates than other developed and developing countries, there are still some common trends and numbers to divorce around the world.

PREVALENCE OF DIVORCE



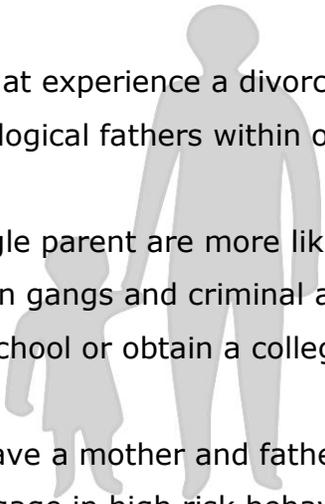
It is estimated that the overall divorce rate in the United States is approximately 51% and in Canada it is 48%; Japan's divorce rate is about 27%, Australia is around 40% and Great Britain has a divorce rate of about 38%. The number of divorces per year tends to be increasing in many areas, with second and subsequent marriages having a higher overall divorce rate than first marriages.

As the number of divorces continues to rise in most areas and countries, so does the cultural acceptance of divorce. In the United States alone about 1.5 million children will experience divorce every year, and these are only kids that are recognized through the courts. In many cases such as step-parent divorce, the child may not be included in these numbers because they are not included in the dissolution of the marriage. Step-parent divorces can be just as problematic for the child, however, especially if they were close to the step-parent and saw them as a support person in their life.

RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH PARENT

Perhaps one of the most damaging side effects of divorce is the lack of parental involvement by one or both parents with the children through the divorce. If parents are not able to put their children's needs and emotional security in front of their own they run the risk of destroying the relationship with their kids, thereby increasing the chance that the children will have emotional and behavioral problems directly related to this damaged relationship.

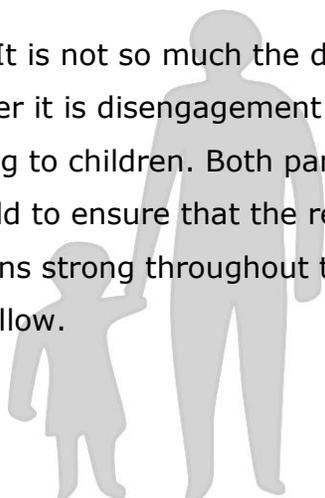
It is concerning to note that:

- 
- A faint, light gray silhouette of a parent and a child walking together. The parent is on the right, taller, and the child is on the left, smaller. They are both facing forward.
- 40% of all children that experience a divorce do not have regular contact with their biological fathers within one year of the divorce
 - Kids living with a single parent are more likely to live in poverty, more likely to be involved in gangs and criminal activities and less likely to graduate from high school or obtain a college degree
 - Children that don't have a mother and father role model in their lives are more likely to engage in high risk behaviors, become sexually active much earlier, have lower self-esteem and seek attention from others rather than being satisfied with their own feelings of achievement
 - 75% of all teenagers at chemical abuse treatment programs are from single parent families and report infrequent or no contact with the non-custodial parent
 - According to research children of divorce that live with one parent and have no contact with the other parent are at greater risk for certain health conditions such as asthma (almost 50% higher risk),

headaches, speech problems, learning difficulties, separation anxiety issues and school related behavioral problems

- Kids that have routine, constant and positive interactions with both parents on a frequent basis have the fewest health, emotional and behavioral problems
- Children with both parents involved in school progress and contact, even when they are divorced, have higher graduation rates, better grades and are less likely to drop out of school

The research is very clear. It is not so much the divorce itself that causes the stress on the children; rather it is disengagement or neglect of one or both of the parents that is damaging to children. Both parents have to work together with each other and the child to ensure that the relationship between both parents and the child remains strong throughout the separation and divorce as well as in the years to follow.

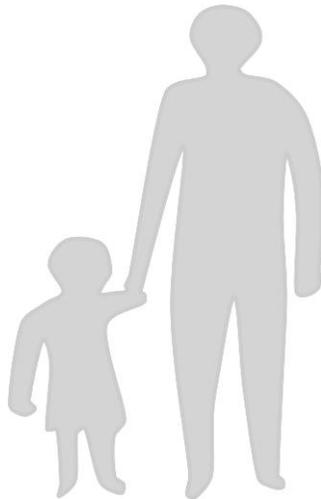


RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIBLINGS

During the divorce the relationship between brothers and sisters or step siblings can become damaged, just as the relationship between parents and children can be affected. Many older children are called on by parents to provide additional care for younger brothers or sisters, and this can really lead to resentment from the older kids.

Sometimes younger children may also try to assume parenting roles with younger siblings if they see Mom or Dad becoming stressed or incapable of taking on a parenting role. It is critical to keep things as normal as possible

between the siblings in the family; don't ask kids to assume roles they are not ready for or roles that they resent. There is naturally going to be some tension between kids, especially if one child is very angry or upset over the divorce and is refusing to communicate or spend time with a parent. Keeping the lines of communication open, speaking positively about the kids and to the children and encouraging them to keep on being good brothers and sisters to each other is critical to maintain their relationship with each other.



2

MODELS OF PARENTING DURING DIVORCE

Since there are such a large number of families experiencing divorce, there has been and continues to be a huge amount of research completed on the topic every year. Professionals that work with families in divorce (including Child Development Specialists, Consultants, Family Therapists, Play Therapists, Psychologist and Psychiatrists) all conduct routine evaluations of how different types of parenting styles or models impact on children. This research indicates that there are basically three models used by parents in most areas, although they may be known by different names in different countries. For purposes of this discussion these parenting models will be known as:

- Independent Parenting
- Parallel Parenting
- Co-Parenting

The models are discussed from the most distant type of model to the highest level of communication, collaboration and dual parent interaction with regards to the children. Parents may find that in the initial phases of the divorce when the emotional level is high, the first two may be more practical and manageable, but parents should be working towards the third model, the collaborative co-parenting model as the ultimate parenting through divorce goal.

INDEPENDENT PARENTING

Independent parenting is really exactly what you may expect the term to mean. In this parenting arrangement each parent manages their own rules, expectations and day-to-day routines with respect to the children when the children are in their care. To avoid confusion, having custody of the children will be known as parenting time in this book. So, in independent parenting models, when it is Mom's parenting time she makes the rules, sets discipline and handles all issues without consultation with Dad. Dad likewise sets rules, develops discipline policies and handles the decisions when the kids are with him, again without consultation with Mom.

Most parents, especially those with older children, can quickly see that this can be a potential disaster in the making. The problems with independent parenting models are:

- Kids quickly learn Mom and Dad are not talking or collaborating, and may take advantage of the situation by play both parents off each other. In the worse case scenario these kids will be literally living two lives disconnected from each other without the ability to talk about or comment on what is happening in their other home.
- All children need structure and predictability in their life. This model may not provide any structure or predictability, especially if Mom and Dad have very different views of parenting. Kids may be highly confused if rules, expectations and discipline are vastly different between homes.
- Kids don't have the opportunity to continue to see and understand both parents are working together; rather they clearly see that Mom and Dad are in conflict and not interacting. This may teach children all

the wrong skills needed to be effective communicators and problem solvers in their own lives.

In very high conflict situations independent parenting may be first step or model that most parents use. Working with a family therapist, communication or conflict coach, parenting co-ordinator or other professional can help parents get back on track with communication and positive and productive interactions with regards to the children.

PARALLEL PARENTING

Parallel parenting is still a limited interaction model between the two parents, and is the one most often used by parents in the period directly after the divorce. In parallel parenting both parents work together to achieve the same goals for their children.

A great way to picture this is to think of a railroad track. Each parent is one rail of the track, both heading in the same direction to make sure the train (or child in this case) gets to the same goal destination. Parallel parenting requires that parents have a common understanding of what each other are doing in their respective household with regards to the kids, and they ensure that what they are doing is similar. There is limited interaction or communication between parents, but children have predictability, structure and routine through their parenting time with both Mom and Dad.

Often parents that are using a parallel parenting model will have a written parenting plan, which is a document that outlines the various aspects of raising their children. Parenting plans will include details of the children's lives such as parenting time schedules (access and visitation in legal terms), routines, discipline, medical issues, supervision, and extra financial

considerations for special events and even issues of daily routines and extracurricular activities for the children.

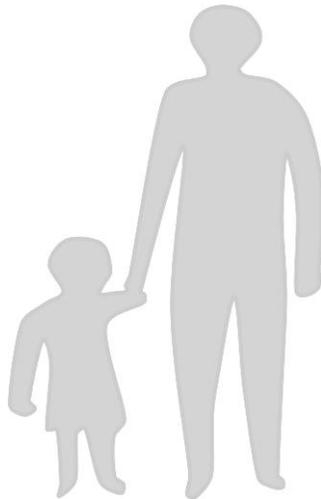
Communication between parents may be through attorneys, therapists or counselors, mediators or even via email if personal contact is still stressful. In most cases parallel parenting is beneficial to the children since they have security, routine and the understanding that Mom and Dad are working together in their upbringing and care.

CO-PARENTING

The most child friendly model of parenting through divorce is the model most commonly known as co-parenting. In this model Mom and Dad continue to discuss issues as they relate to the child or children, interact routinely with regards to information specific to the kids, and often talk and/or phone each other with questions or concerns about the kids. While parents may not specifically spend time together with the kids, many co-parents attend birthday parties, school events and other special activities together to allow the child to feel very much a part of both parent's lives.

Many people feel that co-parenting is an unreasonable expectation for divorced parents, however research clearly indicates that this is the best possible model for your children, provided both parents can remain civil, respectful and child centered during discussions and interactions. Co-parenting is almost like operating a business with the other parent as a partner with the goal of raising the happiest, healthiest kids. Co-parenting does not mean that you have to have extended conversations about anything other than the kids' health, happiness and general well being and development.

Co-parenting requires a lot of effort on both parent's part. Whatever caused the break up of the marriage has to be put aside or in the past, with all communication between the two parents now related to bringing up your children. Anger and frustration may occur, but effective co-parents use anger management and communication techniques to minimize or eliminate any anger towards each other in the presence of the children.



3

RESPONSES TO DIVORCE BY CHILDREN

All children, no matter what their age or developmental stage will experience some effects of the divorce. In the case of very young infants they may not express these issues verbally; however you may notice a change in behavior during the divorce and then may see other issues later as the child matures. Older kids may indicate they accept the divorce, but there may feel torn or hurt about the breakup of the family.

UNDERSTANDING THE GRIEF CYCLE

Typically children will go through a grief cycle when parents divorce. Each child, depending on their age, their personality and their ongoing contact or lack of contact with both parents will experience divorce in slightly different ways.

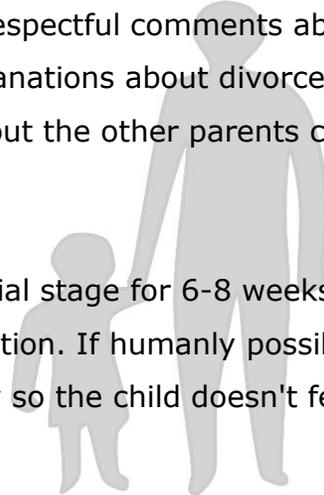
Most kids will experience the following phases during the divorce and the time period of about a year immediately after the divorce. Each child will be slightly different their expression of these phases or stages, but typical reactions will include both emotional and behavioral changes that can be worrisome and even problematic for parents.

DENIAL

Kids in denial simply don't want to accept the fact that Mom and Dad are getting a divorce. During the denial stage, and all through the divorce, parents have to be very positive about the other parent and must keep any explanations about the divorce or separation simple and to the basic issues as they relate to the kids. Important questions to answer include:

- Where the child is going to live
- When the child will get to see both parents
- Ongoing expressions of love from both parents towards the child
- Good, positive and respectful comments about the other parent
- Simple, concise explanations about divorce that are age appropriate and not negative about the other parents character or behavior

Most kids will be in the denial stage for 6-8 weeks, sometimes longer if there has been a previous separation. If humanly possible set a schedule of parenting time immediately so the child doesn't feel rejected or abandoned by either parent.



ANGER

Kids will be angry going through the divorce for several reasons. These can include:

- Anger at themselves that they may have done something to cause the divorce
- Anger at a parent for leaving the home
- Anger at a parent for making the other parent leave

- Anger at the changes in their life
- Anger at being moved from Mom's to Dad's house and back again with no regard for their schedule , desires or wants
- Anger at lack of control in their lives
- Anger at the feelings of rejection and abandonment they may feel

ANXIETY

Kids often show anxiety in their behaviors more that they express it in words. Children showing anxiety may be more likely to:

- Have emotional outbursts at family members or at school
- Have eating, sleeping or behavioral disorders
- Complain of headaches, stomach aches and fatigue
- Need to have constant reassurance
- Want to be close to a parent all the time
- Insist on sleeping in the same bed or room as the parent
- Experience nightmares, anxiety attacks and withdraw from activities

CONFUSION

It is very normal for children to be confused about what is happening through the divorce. Whenever possible provide lots of structure, predictability and routine between Mom's house and Dad's house to eliminate or minimize confusion. Calendars, agendas, text messages, email reminders are all good ways to help keep children informed of the information they need to know regarding time with Mom, time with Dad, who is picking them up or where they are to go after school or on the weekend.

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