

Children of Divorce

Now that the decision has been made to get a divorce, how will that affect the parents and the children? Remember, while getting divorced has legal ramifications, most of the emotional aspects of the divorce will occur outside of the courtroom. Parents will have to learn how to deal with the effects of the divorce, both for themselves and for the children.

When considering how to treat your children, remember the following rule: The only people involved in the divorce that truly love the children are the parents. While the attorneys, judges, social workers, and custody evaluators might make their best efforts to seek what is in the child's best interest, only the parents can make honest decisions based on their love for the child. Additionally, the parents are the participants that will: 1) be there even after the divorce is finalized; 2) spend enough time with their child to see the real effects of the divorce; and 3) eventually have all of the power to make important decisions for their child.

Fortunately there is little difference between a child of divorce and a child of an intact two-parent family. Thus, many children continue to develop in a psychologically healthy way. Be aware that this is a general analysis. In individual cases, the effects can be significantly different.

It is also important to note that there is controversy as to whether negative effects of divorce are a result of the divorce itself or of the conflict in the home that leads to a divorce. In other words, does a child's suffering arise from the change in family structure that comes from a divorce or is it a result of parental conflict, economic stress or poor parenting? If the effects are due to conflict with the family, and not simply the separation of the parents, these effects may be much more widespread. If so, children in intact two-parent families are likely to encounter some of the same problems.

WHAT DIVORCING PARENTS CAN DO TO HELP

A. PARENTAL BEHAVIORS TO BE ENCOURAGED:

What Parents Should Do

Quick Checklist:

- , *Depending on the child's age, tell the child about the divorce.*
- , *Engage the child.*
- , *Increase social and economic support.*
- , *Improve your personal abilities.*
- , *Assist in redefining parental roles.*
- , *Help the child adjust with friends.*
- , *Make sure the child is not blaming him/her self.*
- , *Be aware of how the child perceives possible remarriage.*

Tell the child about the divorce: If they are old enough to understand marriage, tell them about the divorce. How and what you say depends on the age of the child.

Engage the child: Do not withdraw from family role relationships. Be consistent in the role you played prior to the divorce.

Find more outside support: The amount of assistance custodial parents receive to cope with divorce affects parenting. Research suggests that 30% of divorcing mothers and fathers experience severe depression. Seek support from relatives, friends, social agencies, leisure groups and partners. Be aware

that the effects of divorce extend to the areas of support as well. Friends and family may feel divided by the divorce and offer less support.

Improve personal abilities: Personal improvements coincide with a custodial parent's ability to cope. Research suggests that parents should attempt to 1) improve marketable skills (pursue a new career); 2) adopt non-traditional sex-role attitudes (this helps parents view the new arrangement as more autonomous); 3) improve the ability to establish new social relationships; 4) reach for higher levels of education (this can be a problem considering the economic situation), 5) increase income (typically, a divorce means a lower standard of living, especially for mothers who may return to work from a stay-at-home role; 6) grow emotionally; 7) recuperate and recover (there is a relationship between the effect of the trauma and the custodial parent's ability to recover and adjust to the divorce. The quicker the recovery for the parents, the more likely a healthy recovery for the child.

Redefinition of parental roles: The child might have to realize new expectations about which parent will be doing what. Who will be cooking the meals and when? Which parent will pick up the child after soccer practice? These issues must be considered by both parents before discussing them with the child. The divorce may also effect the role of disciplinarian. Who will make decisions and how will they be implemented? Be aware that as a result of divorce, many parents make fewer maturity demands on their children and communicate less. It is important to demand the same positive behavior as before the divorce. Offering limited control over the child can have detrimental effects on their behavior.

Possible adjustments within the peer groups: Children might be ashamed of the divorce and fear rejection by their peers. How will your child tell her friends? How will this affect her group of friends? Might the child have to move and create new friends? The parent can assist the child in making this transition.

Trauma upon recognition of parents' failures in marriage: The parents will not feel as though they are the only ones that did not make the marriage work. Remember, a divorce breaks up the family, not just the couple. It is imperative that the parents recognize the profound effect on the children and keep lines of communication open.

Adjustment upon parents remarrying: If either or both parents decide to remarry, consider, and be prepared for, the potential effect on the child.

What Parents Should Avoid

Quick Checklist:

- Conflict with each other, especially in front of the child.*
- Inconsistent parenting.*
- Being less supportive for the child.*
- Using the child as a weapon against each other.*
- Attempting to alienate the child from each other.*

B. PARENTAL BEHAVIORS TO BE AVOIDED:

Conflict: Children perceive post-divorce conflict as continued divisiveness, thus extending the divorce trauma.

Greater inconsistency in parenting: After a divorce, parents tend to have different expectations from the child than they had before the divorce. Additionally, the parents' own emotions and desire to not further harm the child may affect how they parent. For the sake of the child, the parents need to present a consistent environment that reflects an effective parenting style.

Less supportive behavior toward the child: Post-divorce, the child likely needs more emotional support than ever before. It is also a time when parents often become less available. Parents need to make a conscious effort to support the child's needs.

Using the child as a weapon against the other parent: Unfortunately, parents are often caught up in their own emotional battle with each other. Parents filled with anger have a tendency to do whatever it takes to put the other parent at a disadvantage. This may include saying inappropriate things to the child and threatening the other parent's rights and desires with their ability to see the child. This places the child in an unfortunate position and may cause great emotional distress.



SON WANTS ONE OF US TO LEAVE HOME--HE'S THE ONLY KID IN HIS CLASS WITH TWO PARENTS."

Parental alienation: Sometimes one parent tries to diminish the role of the other parent by belittling that parent to the child. Whether for psychological or custody reasons, the parent will behave in a way so that the child will resist a continued relationship with the other parent. This can have serious detrimental effects on the child.

WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT FROM YOUR CHILD:

A. GENERAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE SEVERITY OF THE TRAUMA

The following statements are generalizations. While some will be true for a given individual case, they will not all be true in all cases.

Quality of relationship: More trauma can be expected if the child had a close relationship to the non-custodial parent before the divorce. It should be noted that some people think that if the child has a high quality relationship with the custodial parent, that might

overcome the stress of a poor quality relationship with the other parent or even conflict between the parents. However, Lutzke et al (1996) found that this is not the case. In fact, it appears important for the child to have a good relationship with both parents.

Perceptions of the home environment: The age of the child is a big factor in terms of how he/she perceives what is going on during a divorce. Additionally, the home environment also effects the child's perceptions. Research suggests that many children perceived the home as satisfactory previous to the divorce. Some research suggests that if a child has misidentified an unhappy home as a happy one, then s/he will be more likely to have a severe reaction to the divorce. On the other hand, children who were aware that their home was unhappy before the divorce were more likely to believe the divorce was best for all concerned. Also, children who were from homes where open conflict was low generally had better outcomes than children from openly high-conflict homes.

Gender of the child: It is important to remember that kids tend to go to teachers for emotional support, something that's easier for girls than for boys. Another effect is that boys may experience more trauma because their same-sex role model is more likely to disengage. Reactions for boys include the following: 1) boys exhibit lower levels of socially competent behavior than girls (the boys are more demanding, noncompliant, aggressive, less mature, and have more interpersonal problems); 2) boys tend to receive more punitive and inconsistent behavior from custodial parents; 3) boys tend to have more problems in school, problems with acting out, aggression, opposition and impulsivity.

Relationship between the parents: The most important factor in evaluating the severity of divorce is the conflict between parents. Unfortunately, divorce can lead to even more conflict between some couples.

Remarriage: While a parent remarrying often offers a financial advantage, as well as increased parental supervision and support, there is little evidence that the child's behavior and achievement improve as a result of the remarriage.

Age of the child: While research is controversial, the age of the child often affects the level of trauma. The age of the child suggests different possible perceptions:

Infants and toddlers

While there is little data on the effect of divorce on infants and toddlers, parents must consider to whom the child is most attached. The child may have come to expect certain behaviors from the primary attachment figure, thus offering a safe and secure environment. Parents should do their best to continue similar behaviors so the child can develop successfully. Be aware that if the child's primary attachment is to the mother and the mother becomes physically unavailable (e.g., she must return to work or school), this could have dramatic results on the child. Some research suggests that toddlers may regress in their behaviors (e.g., losing toilet training skills, clinging to adults more). These children may appear moody or afraid. They may also encounter sleeping and eating problems.

Ages 3-9

As preschoolers, especially between the ages of 3 and 6, thoughts tend to be egocentric. Children tend to blame themselves for the divorce. While these children might feel responsible for the divorce, they may also feel they have the power to reunite the parents (e.g., if I am good, Daddy will come back). When disengaged from one or both parents, the effects of divorce are worse than other periods. At this age, the child has fewer social outlets to turn to in crisis. Thus, the role of the parents is of utmost importance. Since these children better understand divorce than do younger children, they are more likely to grieve and feel sadness. Depression is more common in these children. The older children within this age group tend to be less egocentric. The child progresses from blaming himself to blaming a parent. The older the child gets, the more likely the child will get angry at one or both parents.

Ages 9 and up

A child of this age is more capable of accurately perceiving an unhappy family. Upon hearing of an impending divorce, these children are also more likely to feel unhappy and upset. As children get older, friends and school offer more social support. Ultimately, these children are better able to utilize adult support systems to deal with their emotions. Parents should be aware that as older children begin to develop their own intimate relationships, they may begin to question their own ability to maintain a relationship.

Psychological Effects for Children

Quick Checklist:

- Denial of divorce.*
- A sense of loss.*
- Feeling rejected.*
- Loneliness.*
- Anger.*
- Conflicted loyalties.*

___ *Somatic complaints.*

POSSIBLE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

Unlike the parents, the child is not at all prepared for the decision to break up the household. To many children, suddenly having one custodial parent is much like the death of the non-custodial parent. Amato & Keith (1991) suggest "children who experience parental death tend to be better off than children who experience divorce." Both parents must be prepared for psychological reactions similar to those of losing a parent. Even though the child will likely maintain some sort of relationship with the departed parent, the relationship is often devalued (often by the parents), thus saddening the child. Some possible feelings for the child are 1) denial; 2) sense of loss; 3) anxiety; 4) rejection; 5) loneliness; 6) anger; 7) conflicted loyalties; 8) somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, anorexia, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea).

Possible Behavior Problems

Quick Checklist:

___ *Conduct problems.*

___ *Academic problems.*

___ *Social difficulties.*

___ *Increased alcohol use.*

___ *Increased sexual behaviors.*

C. COMMON BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:

As a result of the divorce and the psychological effects, the child may begin to act out. Increased misbehavior may become apparent at home or at school. Behavior problems to watch out for include the following: 1) academic problems; 2) aggression towards parents (e.g., following visits to the non-residential parent, the children may behave inappropriately upon returning home; 3) alcohol and drug involvement; 4) increased sexual behaviors.

D. POSSIBLE LONG-TERM EFFECTS

While divorce is often painful for all involved, longitudinal research about the effects of divorce is positive. Such studies have found that the severe problems seen following divorce are often diminished two years later. Nonetheless, there is evidence of continued problems years after the divorce. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of long-term problems is much higher if parental conflict is high. Examples include 1) poor relationships with parents; 2) high levels of problem behavior; 3) increased likelihood of dropping out of school.

Education: Researchers have found that children of divorce tend to end their educations earlier than children of intact two-parent families. This especially holds true for women. One theory is that there is less financial support from the parents, having a more severe impact on the women than the men. The reduced education may have broad ranging effects.

The Sleeper Effect: Some children grow up to experience problems in their own romantic relationships as a result of being a child of divorce. As a consequence of the divorce, they may fear the potential for betrayal in a relationship, rather than embracing commitment.

INTERVENTIONS

Other Interventions

Quick Checklist:

- ___ *Individual therapy for parents to learn how to stabilize the environment.*
- ___ *Individual therapy for children regarding their feelings about the divorce.*
- ___ *Group therapy for parents and/or children.*
- ___ *Consider joint physical custody.*

A. AGE AND THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS:

For preschoolers, interventions should concentrate on the parents in the form of a family-focused intervention. The sessions should concentrate on communicating with the child and trying to stabilize the child's environment. The therapy may also emphasize parenting skills and reducing conflict. For young elementary children, the child should be involved in the therapeutic intervention. Children of this age tend to not want to talk about the divorce. Thus, discussing the issue indirectly (e.g., I know another child of divorce who felt unhappy) might be most effective. Older children are more successful with direct interventions. The children have more success in recognizing and communicating their feelings about divorce.

B. GROUP THERAPY:

In this setting, children meet on a regular basis with other children and a counselor. During the session, the children share feelings and experiences. They learn about problem-solving skills and offer peer support.

C. JOINT CUSTODY:

Assuming the parents believe they can continue a joint physical custody arrangement without conflict, researchers believe this is usually the best situation for the child. With this arrangement, the child retains maximum parental support, both emotionally and financially.

Potential Resources

Behavioral health professionals trained to deal with children and adolescents (including psychologists, social workers, counselors, and social workers) School psychologists, counselors, and teachers Your family doctor or pediatrician Your minister, rabbi, bishop, or priest Parent support groups Parents Anonymous Your health insurance company (look for "behavioral health services" or "mental/nervous services" listed in your health benefits booklet) Community information-and-referral services

Web Links

- <http://www.divorcesupport.com>
- <http://www.vix.com/crc>
- <http://www.divorceonline.com>
- <http://www.muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6600.htm>

Books

- *Mom's house, Dad's house: Making two homes for your child*, by Isolina Ricci, PhD
- *Does Wednesday mean Mom's house or Dad's?*, by Marc J. Ackerman, PhD
- *The divorce workbook: An interactive guide for kids and families*, by Sally Blakeslee Ives, PhD, David Fassler, M.D., and Michelle Lash, MEd, ATR

- *The Parents Book About Divorce by Gardner, R* (1991)

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Helping Children Understand Divorce

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When parents decide to divorce, they typically have been through a series of events that have led them to this decision. Whether or not children are aware of parents' decisions depends on many things, including parents' behaviors and children's experiences. In some families, husbands and wives may argue frequently in front of the children, leaving children to suspect that something is going on. In other families, parents may talk quietly about their differences without the children ever knowing. And in other families, parents may argue sometimes and quietly handle their differences at other times. Regardless of the type of adult arguments and interactions that children experience, when parents decide to divorce, children need to know.

The purpose of this guide is to help you understand the thoughts and feelings that children may have when their parents decide to divorce and to provide some tips for talking with children about divorce.

Talking with children about divorce

Children's reactions to parental divorce are related to how parents inform them of their decision. Because of this, it is important for parents to think carefully about how they will tell their children and what they will tell them. When possible, the entire family should meet together so that both parents can answer children's questions. This strategy may also help parents to avoid blaming each other for the divorce. The following tips might make this a smoother process:

- Set aside time to meet as a family
- Plan ahead of time what to tell children
- Stay calm
- Plan to meet again

What to tell children

Remember that divorce is confusing for children. When you first talk with children, limit your discussion to the most important and most immediate issues; children can become confused if they are given too much information at once. Children need to hear that their basic needs will be met, that someone will still fix breakfast in the morning, help them with their homework, and tuck them into bed at night. Children also need to know that their relationship with BOTH parents will continue, if possible. In the face of so many changes, children also need to hear what will remain the same. Parents can reassure their children through words and actions that their love will continue despite the changes in routine family life.

During these family discussions, it is important for parents to tell children that the divorce is final and avoid giving children false hopes that the parents will reunite. Parents can also use this time to tell children that the divorce is not their fault. Most children older than 4 or 5 years commonly believe that the divorce is the result of something that they did. For instance, when asked why parents divorce, some children may explain that parents are divorcing because the children misbehaved or received bad grades in school. Children need repeated reassurance from parents that they are not responsible for the divorce.

Remember to ask children about their fears and concerns. Give children time to think about the divorce and the changes ahead. Meet again as a family to talk about new questions and to reassure children of your ongoing involvement in their lives. Take your children's questions and concerns seriously and LISTEN to what they say. As stated by one child, *"this is gonna affect the rest of my life and I don't know if they just don't realize that, or don't care, or what, but I don't feel like I'm being heard."* Children need to know that parents recognize the impact of divorce on children's lives. By listening to children's thoughts and feelings about the divorce, parents demonstrate their ongoing care and concern.

What I need from my mom and dad:

- **I need both of you to stay involved in my life.** Even if you don't live close by, please letters, make phone calls, and ask me lots of questions about who I spend time with and like and don't like to do. When you don't stay involved in my life, I feel like I'm not important that you don't really love me.
- **Please stop fighting and work hard to get along with each other.** Try to agree on matters related to me and my needs. When you fight about me, I think that I did something wrong and feel guilty.
- I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I spend with each of you. **Please support the time that I spend with each of you.** If you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to love and love one parent more than the other.
- **Please communicate directly with my other parent so that I don't have to send messages back and forth.** I want you to talk with each other so that the messages are communicated the right way and so that I don't feel like I am going to mess up.
- **When talking about my other parent, please say only nice things, or don't say anything at all.** When you say mean, unkind things about my other parent, I feel like you are putting me down and expecting me to take your side.
- **Please remember that I want both of you to be a part of my life.** I count on my mom and dad to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.

Children's understanding of divorce by age group

Children's understanding of parental divorce depends on their age. It is important for parents to know what thoughts and feelings children of different ages may be having so that they can modify their own behaviors to help children adjust to the divorce.

Child age	What children understand	Children's thoughts and feelings	What parents can do for children
Infants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infants notice changes in parents' energy level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More irritability, such as crying and fussing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep normal schedules and routines.

	<p>and emotional state.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older infants notice when one parent is no longer living in the home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in sleeping, napping, and other daily routines. • If a new adult moves into the home, older infants may be nervous and fearful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure infants of your continued presence with physical affection and loving words. • Keep children's favorite toys, blankets, or stuffed animals close at hand. • Gradually introduce older infants to new adult friends.
Toddlers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that one parent no longer lives at home. • May express empathy toward others, such as a parent who is feeling sad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May have difficulty separating from parents. • May express anger toward parent. • May lose some of the skills they have developed, like toilet training. • Toddlers may show some of the behaviors that they "grew out of," such as thumbsucking. • Sleeping and naptime routines may change. • Older toddlers may have nightmares. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend more time with children when preparing to separate (e.g., arrive 10 to 15 minutes earlier than usual when you take your child to child care). • Provide physical and verbal reassurance of your love. • Show understanding of child's distress; recognize that, given time and support, old behaviors (thumbsucking) will disappear and newly developed skills (toilet training) will reappear. • Talk with other important adults and caregivers about how to support your child during this transition time.
Preschool and early elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preschoolers recognize that one parent no longer lives at home. • Elementary school children begin to understand that divorce means their parents will no longer be married and live together, and that their parents no longer love each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will likely blame themselves for the divorce. • May worry about the changes in their daily lives. • Have more nightmares. • May exhibit signs of sadness and grieving because of the absence of one parent. • Preschoolers may be aggressive and angry toward the parent they "blame." • Because preschoolers struggle with the difference between fantasy and reality, children may have rich fantasies about parents getting back together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeatedly tell children that they are not responsible for the divorce. • Reassure children of how their needs will be met and of who will take care of them. • Talk with children about their thoughts and feelings; be sensitive to children's fears. • Plan a schedule of time for children to spend with their other parent. Be supportive of children's ongoing relationship with the other parent. • Read books together about children and divorce (see list at end of guide). • Gently, and matter-of-factly, remind children that the divorce is final and that parents will not get back together again.

<p>Preteens and adolescents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what divorce means but may have difficulty accepting the reality of the changes it brings to their family. • Although thinking at a more complex level, still may blame themselves for the divorce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May feel abandoned by the parent who moves out of the house. • May withdraw from long-time friends and favorite activities. • May act out in uncharacteristic ways (start using bad language, become aggressive or rebellious). • May feel angry and unsure about their own beliefs concerning love, marriage, and family. • May experience a sense of growing up too soon. • May start to worry about "adult matters," such as the family's financial security. • May feel obligated to take on more adult responsibilities in the family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain open lines of communication with children; reassure children of your love and continued involvement in their lives. • Whenever possible, both parents need to stay involved in children's lives, know children's friends, what they do together, and keep up with children's progress at school and in other activities. • Honor family rituals and routines (Sunday dinner, weeknight homework time, grocery shopping together, watch favorite television shows or movies as a family). • If you need to increase children's household responsibilities, assign chores and tasks that are age-appropriate (help with laundry, housecleaning, yardwork, meal preparations); show appreciation for children's contributions. • Avoid using teenage children as confidants; plan special time for yourself with adult friends and family members. • Tell children who will be attending special occasions such as sporting events and graduation ceremonies, especially if you plan to take a new romantic partner.
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Sibling relationships in divorced families

When parents divorce, brothers and sisters may begin to interact differently. While some siblings become closer at this time, others may argue more and become emotionally distant. It is difficult to predict how children will respond in any particular family.

The emotional stress that parents feel following divorce may temporarily reduce the amount of attention they are able to give their children. As a result, some children turn to one another for nurturance and support. Because siblings experience many of the same emotions, they are able to understand each other's feelings and concerns and to reassure each other. Other children, however, may engage in more conflict with their siblings. These children may feel confused and angry about the changes that are occurring in their family and they take these negative feelings out on their siblings. Some siblings also engage in more conflict because they are competing for their parents' attention.

Parents may be able to reduce their children's rivalry by talking with them, listening to them, and spending some time alone with each child. Parents also need to realize that younger siblings may have an easier time expressing their confusion than their older siblings.

Therefore, parents should be sure to talk to the older siblings even if they do not seem upset. It is also important for parents to encourage children to continue rituals that were established before the divorce so they will have some feelings of continuity and stability.

We extend our appreciation to Amanda Kowal, assistant professor of human development and family studies, for her insights on sibling relationships in divorced families.

Using books to talk with children about divorce

Children's books about divorce can help them work through the issues they face. Reading books can give children a way to express their emotions and discuss issues that they may not otherwise be comfortable talking about. Parents also may benefit from these books by learning common things that children of divorce experience.

It's not your fault, KoKo Bear. Vicky Lansky (1998) Book Peddlers. This book is designed for parents and children ages 3 to 5 years to read together. Each page provides a large picture to show what is happening in the story and includes messages for parents. The messages for parents help make a connection between the story and what happens to children in real families. KoKo Bear faces situations that help him learn what divorce means, and that he is not to blame for the divorce. He is helped to talk about his feelings, and is told that he is still loved by both parents. Daily events that children and parents may have to face differently due to divorce are presented and problems are solved through talking, sharing, and special activities.

Dinosaurs Divorce: A guide for changing families. Laurene Krasney Brown and Marc Brown (1986) Little Brown and Company. This award-winning book is designed for parents and young school-aged children to read together — at least the first few times. Stories are presented in a cartoon strip pattern and organized around topics that are recognized as important for children experiencing the divorce of their parents. Issues such as why parents divorce, living with one parent, having two homes, telling friends, parents' new partners, and celebrating special occasions are discussed. Solutions to problems that may come up are seen through the actions of the dinosaur children and their parents. A table of contents and a glossary are useful for children who may choose to re-read specific stories. The artwork is very appealing to children.

How do I feel about: My parents' Divorce. Julia Cole (1997) Copper Beach Books. This book is written for older school-aged children with some reading skills, but should be read at least the first time with a parent so that the child may ask questions. The table of contents outlines the topics covered in the book: what is divorce? why does it happen? difficult feelings, and feeling O.K. A variety of photographs of different children and cartoon illustrations expand on the text to show that everybody lives in a situation that is unique. Children will gain an understanding that they are not alone in having their parents divorce and that there is more than one way that problems may be faced or solved. Pictures of daily life events and hassles show the reader that situations can get better!

Pre-Teen Pressures: Divorce. Debra Goldentyer (1998). Steck-Vaughn Company. This book, written for pre-teen readers, covers a wide range of issues, some of which may be applicable to your family situation. Because this book deals with a wide range of topics, you should read it before going through it with your children. This book discusses common changes that take place for divorcing families. A variety of families are presented to show that there are many reasons why marriages end (affairs, violence/abuse and alcoholism). A variety of family stories are used to show that individuals adjust differently, make different decisions and move on to new relationships at different speeds. Photographs are used and

include colorful titles. Divorce is presented clearly as an event that is shared by many families who deal with it in a variety of ways. The children's roles in their adjustment to divorce are emphasized.

(We extend our thanks to Joan Turner, Brett Dayton, and Maridith Jackson for their careful review of the children's books.)

For more ideas on talking with children about divorce, see MU guide [GH6602](#), *Activities for Helping Children Deal with Divorce*. (Call 1-800-292-096 to order a copy.)

Places to look for help

General parenting information

ParentLink, 1-800-552-8522. Provides research-based information to assist parents.

Web Connections

<http://outreach.missouri.edu/cooper/fok/> Provides linkages to lists of books, organizations and web sites for parents. These resources are provided as a service and do not constitute endorsement. They are periodically reviewed and updated.

Single parents

Parents Without Partners (PWP international headquarters), 401 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611 (312-644-6610). Provides free referrals to local PWP chapters, which offer social and educational opportunities for single parents. Membership fees vary. <http://parentswithoutpartners.org>

Single Parent Resource Center, 31 E. 28th Street, Suite 200, New York, NY 10016-9998 (212-951-7030). Offers free referrals for childcare and legal services, as well as information about how to start a single-parent support group. <http://singleparentresources.com>

National Organization of Single Mothers, Inc., P.O. Box 68, Midland, NC 28107 (704-888-5437). Provides free advice on how to start support groups and offers referrals to other single parents nationwide. Publishes *Single Mother* magazine (bi-monthly). One-year individual membership: \$12.97. <http://www.singlemothers.org>

National Congress for Fathers and Children (NCFC), P.O. Box 171675, Kansas City, MO 66117 (1-800-733-3237). Instructs single fathers on custody, child-support and paternity issues. Publishes a 132-page manual and a quarterly newsletter called *Network*. Also has a list of NCMC advisers nationwide. One-year membership: \$50. <http://ncfc.net/ncfc>

National Fatherhood Initiative, One Bank Street, Suite 160, Gaithersburg, MD 20878 (1-800-790-3237). Offers a quarterly newsletter and a catalog of books and videos focusing on fatherhood issues. One-year membership: \$35. <http://www.fatherhood.org>

Stepparents

The Stepfamily Association of America, Inc., 650 J Street, Suite 205, Lincoln, NE 68508 (1-800-735-0329). Publishes a quarterly magazine, *Stepfamilies*, and an 89-page book, *Stepfamilies Stepping Ahead*. Provides referrals to more than 60 local chapters nationwide. Offers a variety of hard-to-find books, tapes, manuals and other materials about stepfamilies. One-year membership, including magazine subscription and book: \$35. <http://www.stepfam.org>

The Stepfamily Network, Inc., 555 Bryant Street #361, Palo Alto, CA 94301 (1-800-487-1073). Provides information on stepfamily resources and support groups. It is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping stepfamily members achieve harmony and mutual respect. <http://stepfamily.net>

The Stepfamily Foundation, 333 West End Avenue, New York, NY 10023 (212-877-3244). Offers workshops on stepfamily dynamics, holds individual and family counseling sessions over the telephone and in person, and publishes lists of books, audiotapes and videotapes for stepfamilies. One-year membership: \$70. (Counseling costs are extra.) <http://www.stepfamily.org>

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This guide is a revision and update of *The Effects of Divorce on Children*, originally written by Karen DeBord, former state specialist in human development and family studies at the University of Missouri-Columbia.
