

Minimizing the Impact of Divorce

It's hard enough for parents to cope with the pain and struggle of their crumbling marriage without children involved. But children are often not only involved, they're stuck in the middle.

We know that boys often will have more difficulty in response to the separation of Mom and Dad than girls, though the way parents interact with their children can effect their adjustment regardless of sex.

A separation puts children in a state of crisis. They often feel out of control and helpless to impact change. They may feel their world is falling apart and "act out" the turmoil with increased noncompliance and behavioral problems. They may withdraw and lose motivation in school, or struggle with depression.

It is difficult to predict exactly how a child will respond to their parent's separation or divorce, but we know that the parent's behaviors can impact their children's well-being—positively...and negatively.

Some suggest that these factors may aide children through this difficult transition—limiting the negative impact:

- ◆ Parents do not put children in the middle of the conflict
- ◆ Children are told ahead of time of the separation
- ◆ Children are aware of the conflict between parents
- ◆ Children are not held responsible for the divorce
- ◆ Children are not used for parental support
- ◆ Children receive support from other significant people
- ◆ Parents resolve personal anger
- ◆ The absent parent stays in contact with the children
- ◆ The child has siblings
- ◆ The family moves into a new schedule fairly quickly
- ◆ Each parent spends individual time with each child
- ◆ Parents assist each child with individual adjustment reactions
- ◆ Children are allowed to grieve
- ◆ The family focuses on the positive and the future
- ◆ Parents had a previous good relationship with the children
- ◆ Other environmental factors remain stable (same school, home, etc.)

(Portions of the above information were obtained from "Children of Divorce" by Judson Swihart, 1982)

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