Divorce and Its Effect on Children

Over 1 million families experience divorce every year. Because of the high divorce rate and unwed mothers, 61% of our children live in a single parent family. Almost one half of the children who have been through divorce do not see their fathers at all.

Divorce sets these children up for ongoing loss. Not only do they suffer from the loss of their family and not living with one of their parents, they suffer the change of moving, new schools and often new communities. These losses persist because holidays become different; their birthdays are not as simple and special, school events are spoiled because of the divorce and persistent parental discord. In time, many of these children will have to work through new family situations and possibly another move and another new school. The ever suffering of children after divorce continues. It is no wonder that so many of these children have behavior and emotional problems.

The Risk of Divorce for Children

- Children less than 3 years of age often become irritable, cry frequently, seem more afraid, have problems with separation anxiety, do not sleep as well, and display more aggressive behavior towards others.
- Children 4-5 years of age often will blame themselves for the absence or unhappiness of parents and will be very susceptible to low self-esteem and poor self-worth. This often is the seed for depression.
- School age children often are moody, preoccupied, daydream, tantrum and are more aggressive. School performance often suffers as well. They often agonize over divided loyalty.
- Adolescents may develop a premature degree of emotional autonomy. Angry feelings emerge causing some aggression, antisocial behavior or even substance abuse. Many will become lonely and will find a sexual relationship for comfort.
- All children suffering divorce will have more psychosomatic complaints, including headaches, stomachache, dizziness and exaggerated symptoms from viruses. This is an unconscious response to feelings of anger and loss.
- Some children will test the limits and family rules in an effort to reunite the parents.
- Other children will play one parent off against the other to gain power over the situation that appears out of control to them.
Guidelines for Parents

- If the battle between mom & dad continues the child continues to suffer acutely; the longer the battle continues the worse your child will fare. Do not persist in the fight. Divorce, settle the affairs, settle the visitation and leave it. The more fight you participate in, the worse your children will fare. It takes two to fight and never is all one sided.

- If you become depressed, seek a counselor of therapist and get help. Your child has suffered enough; do not force them to live with a depressed parent.

- When it comes to discipline, you should use the same discipline techniques as you used before the divorce. When the rules change and discipline changes then children see things as more out of control and they do not feel as safe or secure. Discipline the same.

- Never make the child choose one parent over the other. Court battles are harmful for children; try not to put them through it.

- Children need routine; as quickly as possible get them into a routine again. Monitor their success at school and with friends to insure that they are successfully tolerating the change.

- If you are seeing aggression from your child, suspect that he or she might be angry. Try to talk to them, give them time to say their peace. Assist them emotionally. If this is not working, then consider professional assistance.

- Do not talk negative about the other parent in front of the child. Your child needs a healthy relationship with both parents to mature and become a well-adjusted adult. When you talk bad about your ex-spouse you are asking your child to choose between parents, and that is unfair!

- Encourage visitation.

- If you see your child losing their resilience, becoming angrier, less tolerant of others, then seek professional help. Because children of divorced parents have more mental health problems, seek help as soon as it is noticed.

- Be honest, tell the truth always. Do not tell your children things they do not need to know unless they ask, but never tell them anything that is not true. A lie is never in their best interest.

- Finally try to develop a positive attitude about your new life with your children. Make every attempt to being positive. Find your own happiness after divorce, it will allow your children to do the same.

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