



## PARENT RESOURCE

# DIVORCED PARENTING

Every year over 1,000,000 children experience parental divorce in our country. Based on current divorce trends, approximately 30% of children born in the 1980's and 1990's will experience a parental divorce before they reach the age of eighteen. It is apparent that divorce and single-parent families have become a way of life in our society.

Many parents who divorce believe they have done irreversible damage to their children because of the parents' permanent separation. However, many of the problems children experience following parental divorce are not due merely to separation from one parent. Recent research indicates that children's adjustment following parental divorce is dependent, to a large extent, on the situation existing after the divorce. Fortunately, parents often have control over many of the post-divorce factors that affect their children's adjustment.

Listed below are recommendations for divorced and/or divorcing parents which should help minimize the negative effects of divorce on their children.

\*Subject children to as few changes as possible as a result of the divorce. For example, parents can try to have their children attend the same school, continue to live in the same home, etc. Of particular importance is consistency in regard to the children's standard of living. For this reason, regular child support payments are often critical.

\*Don't argue or fight with your ex-spouse in the children's presence. This is perhaps the most important issue related to children's adjustment following parental divorce. The amount of parental conflict (e.g., over visitation, support, etc.) that the children witness following divorce is directly related to their level of adjustment.

\*Consistent discipline is very important. Both parents should use similar, age-appropriate discipline techniques with their children. Limits on what is and is not acceptable behavior for their children should also be consistent between the two homes.

\*Don't use children as messengers in parental communications. Children should never be asked to communicate messages such as, "Tell your dad that he is late with the child support payment." Children should not be involved in such issues.

\*Don't use children as spies. Parents should not ask their children questions about the other parent's life (e.g., questions about whom the other parent is dating).

\*Don't use children as allies in parental battles. Always avoid bringing the children into battles with the ex-spouse. Trying to get children to take sides will usually result in worsening the children's relationship with both parents.

\*Don't put down the other parent in front of the children. Remember that your ex-spouse (no matter how much anger you feel toward him or her) is still your children's parent. Whenever possible, it is important for children to have loving relationships with both parents.

\*Don't burden children with personal fears and concerns. Unfortunately, many divorced parents turn to their children for support. This almost always has a negative impact on children and adolescents because they are rarely capable of handling such a stress without harmful effects. Children have enough difficulty with their own adjustment without the added burden of their parents' problems.

\*It is usually in the children's best interest to have a consistent pattern of frequent visits with the non-custodial parent. Frequent cancellations, long periods of no contact, and sporadic visitation schedules often have a detrimental effect on children.

\*If major problems develop for children and/or parents seek professional assistance.

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