

## COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

Parents should tell children about the divorce together if possible. Let the children know how they will be affected by the divorce and reassure them that they are not to blame. Answer questions honestly and avoid unnecessary details. Encourage the children to talk about the divorce and discuss their feeling and problems openly. Counseling or support groups may help children resolve their feelings. Help them to accept the reality of the divorce and do not give them false hope of reunion. Express love and commitment to the children to help them feel secure.

Divorce affects children. If parents remain cooperative, honest, and loving, the effects will be minimal. Children can successfully deal with divorce, but they need good role models. Parents are best able to help children deal with divorce successfully.



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# How Divorce Affects Children



*Elementary Age*

**Friend of the Court  
"For Our Children"**

Adults often see divorce as relief - the best way to end a bad relationship. For most children, divorce is confusion, loneliness, anger, and unanswered questions. This pamphlet is designed to make you aware of some of the ways divorce may affect your child and to offer suggestions as to what you can do to help him/her through this difficult period.

### **ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN**

Children ages 5-12 are expanding their world to include peers and school rather than just family. They react to what is happening by thinking about it and questioning. They worry about many things and believe in living by the rules and that life is fair. Children in this age group feel the loss of family when divorce happens. Loyalty conflicts are common. Children may respond by feeling abandoned and insecure. Because of the less frequent contact with one parent, they fear that something will happen to the parent whom they live with most of the time. Problems at school and with friends may surface. Younger children in this age group often feel very sad at the breakup of the family while older children may have very deep anger.

### **COMMON REACTIONS**

Sadness; crying and sobbing; feels abandoned and rejected; loyalty conflicts; sense of helplessness; hopes parents reconcile; anger; physical complaints; sense of loss; shame; resentment; fear of loneliness; divided loyalties - anger toward the parent they blame for the divorce.

### ***HOW CAN YOU HELP?***

#### **CHILDREN NEED PREDICTABILITY**

Maintain regular routines. Continue frequent and regular contacts with both parents. Continue contact with friends and relatives of both parents. Give the children personal space to call their own. Parents should exercise caution when introducing new boyfriends or girlfriends to children.

#### **CHILDREN NEED RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH PARENTS**

Stress the good points about the other parent and avoid name calling, saying bad things or blaming the other parent for problems. Keep family photos available. Allow children to express their love for the other parent and talk about their ex-

periences with them. If children complain about one parent, the other parent should encourage children to take the complaint to the person responsible rather than agree with the children. Encourage the other parent's involvement in school activities and advise of parent/teacher conferences, provide report cards and give other information pertaining to the welfare of the children.

### **KEEP CHILDREN OUT OF THE MIDDLE**

Talk directly to the other parent about child-related information. Do not ask children what goes on in the other parent's home. Do not argue in front of the children. Don't encourage the child to take sides. Encourage children to follow the rules of the other household even if they are not the same rules you have in your home. Do not withhold the children from the other parent or refuse to pay child support. Be on time for the exchange of children for parenting time. Do not compare children unfavorably to the other parent. Do not depend on the children for emotional support, they need you.