

How Divorce Affects Children



Teenagers



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Friend of the Court
"For Our Children"

Adults often see divorce as relief- the best way to end a bad relationship. For most teenagers, 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 teenager and to offer suggestions as to what you can do to help him/her through this difficult period.

TEENAGERS

This may be the stormiest stage for parent and child relationships. They are going through physical, social and emotional growth. Because of the depth of teens emotions, it deepens their feelings of sadness, anger, embarrassment, betrayal and shame concerning divorce. Divorce causes many teens to prematurely enter adulthood. They may cut themselves off from their peers, become aggressive or deceptive, or become loners. On the other hand, some teens may regress and become uncommonly immature for their age. Teens may become unusually close to one of their parents or feel embarrassed and resentful toward parents who are perceived as giving their own needs priority.

COMMON REACTIONS

Feelings of betrayal; anger; embarrassment; resentment; lack of concentration; chronic fatigue; feeling hurried to achieve independence; over depend-

ence; testing parents' concern for them; aligning with one parent; worries about survival of relationships and their own future marriage.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

TEENS NEED PREDICTABILITY

Maintain a healthy routine environment. Encourage frequent and regular contacts with both parents. Allow them to have personal space where they can be alone. Exercise caution when introducing new boyfriends or girlfriends.

TEENS NEED RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH PARENTS

Stress the good points about the other parent. Keep family photos available. Allow your teenager to express their love for the other parent and talk about their experiences. If your teen should complain about one parent, the other should encourage the teen to take the complaint to the person responsible. Encourage the other parent's involvement in school or other activities and advise of special event dates and times.

KEEP THE TEENAGER OUT OF THE MIDDLE

Parents should talk directly to each other regarding child-related information. Do not argue in front of the teen. Don't expect or encourage your teen to take sides. Do not withhold your teen from the other

parent or refuse to pay child support. Do not jump to conclusions before getting all the information. Don't compare your teen unfavorably with the other parent. Don't expect your teen to take the place of the absent parent or depend on them for emotional support. Remember that time sharing and responsibilities may have to change to meet the changing needs of your teenager.

COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT

Parents should tell children about the divorce together if possible. Let them know how they will be affected by the divorce. Reassure them that they are not to blame for the divorce. Answer questions honestly and avoid unnecessary details. Encourage discussion of their feelings and problems. Accept mood-swings and emotional outbursts and do not take them personally. Counseling or support groups may help teens resolve their feelings. Speak encouragingly about the future and let your child know that you still love them and are committed to them.

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