

How Children Experience Divorce

Divorce is very stressful for parents. It is also hard for children. It is normal for parents to worry about the children. How will you tell them what is going on? How can you help them cope?

Every child is unique. Every child will react differently to divorce. Many things affect how a child responds to divorce. For one thing, children have different understandings of and feelings about divorce. It can help if parents know what children think and feel. This article will explain how many children respond to divorce. This may help you to better understand your children's experiences.

Children of different ages understand different things.

Babies and Toddlers

Babies cannot understand divorce. But they probably notice changes in how the parent feels. They notice if the parent has less energy. They notice a parent's stress.

Toddlers know when a parent moves out. So they may have a hard time saying goodbye to either parent. This may happen when they go to childcare or when they stay with a babysitter. It also may happen when a non-custodial parent visits. Both babies and toddlers may be more fussy. Some toddlers will lose skills that they had learned. For example, some children may lose their toilet-training skills. They will learn those skills again, but this is one way they show stress.

Preschool Children

Preschool children can understand more than younger children. They know that one parent moved out. They might think they did something wrong to make one parent leave. Preschool children may fear that the second parent will leave them too. They may want to carry around a teddy bear or have a pacifier again. These things give them some security during the changes in the family.

Preschool children may show all kinds of different feelings. They may be sad. Sometimes they may be angry. They may worry about all the changes in their lives. Preschoolers are good at imagining things. They do not always know what is real and what is imaginary. They may have daydreams about their parents getting back together.

School-age Children

School-age children usually understand a lot about divorce. They can understand that their parents do not want to be mar-

ried to each other any more. They understand that their parents will not live together now. Like preschoolers, they have lots of different feelings. They may feel angry with the parent who left. They may be happy about going on special outings with one parent. They may feel very sad. They may feel all of those things at the same time. It can be hard to have lots of different feelings at once.

What are the stages when children adjust to divorce?

Children take time to adjust to divorce. Different children react to the same changes in different ways. But there are some common reactions at different times.

- In general, children may find divorce very difficult in the beginning. Parents may be fighting a lot. They may be under a lot of stress. They may not be able to meet their children's needs. Children may not know what is happening, and they may be scared. A few children may be happy that their parents are divorcing, especially if the parents were having bad fights.
- The next stage is when the family separates. At this time children may need to adjust to a new home, having less money, going to a different childcare or school, and so on. For some children, this may be the first time they find out about the divorce. The separation may also be good for some children, because there may be less fighting.
- In the last stage, things may become normal again, but in a new way. With time, children may get used to the changes. However, other changes may happen. For example, one or both parents may decide to get married again and have a stepfamily.

What else affects a child's experience of divorce?

The number of things children lose because of a divorce Sometimes when a parent moves out, the child goes to fewer activities. The family may have less money. The parent may have less energy. It may be harder to arrange transportation. When a parent moves out, it can mean less contact with one set of grandparents, too. Children who lose many things will have a difficult time with the divorce.

The number of changes that occur after a divorce Sometimes children need to move to a new home after a divorce. They may have to go to a new childcare setting or a new school. One parent may need to get a new or a second job. These are all stressful for the children. With more changes, there is more stress.

What the children know and understand Children will have many questions. It is important to help children understand what is going on. This will make the divorce less stressful. There are things you can tell them to help them feel better. They may need to hear these things again and again.

The amount of fighting between parents Before a divorce, there may have been constant fighting between parents. In some houses, one parent constantly criticizes the other parent. These things might get better after a divorce, or they might get worse. Often, divorce leads to custody battles, too. Fighting can be very stressful for children.

How the parents cope with the divorce One of the most powerful influences on children is how the parents adjust. Children are still learning about change. They look to adults to learn about the world. They watch how you act and might copy what you do. Children look to you to know how to cope with stress. If you are coping well, your children will probably cope well, too. It also helps to have other family and friends around. They can support the children when the parent is stressed.

The way children deal with stress

Some children are very flexible and strong. They can handle many changes and stresses. Other children have difficulty with these things. Those children will need more support during a divorce.

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