



PARENTING THROUGH DIVORCE™

Still a family, but reconfigured

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Children are the true innocent and powerless victims of a divorce. They will deal with the consequences of their parents' actions throughout their lives. We can help them now by educating ourselves.

Parents don't want to hurt their children. Few *intend* to do damage—but it happens in spite of good intentions because of *what we don't know*. Because we are in pain, in transition, and possibly in chaos, we are temporarily self-absorbed and distracted. At a time when our children need our attention and reassurance the most, we may be unaware of their needs. In order to help our children adapt to a separation or divorce, we must keep certain things in mind. Our awareness can help create a child-centered divorce.

Parents need to realize as soon as possible that unless one of them decides not to be involved in a child's life, they will be in touch with each other forever. A divorce dissolves the marriage, not the family. Creating peace between you and your (ex)spouse will save years of stress and add to the quality of life for everyone. You *can* create positive change.



Let Kids be Kids

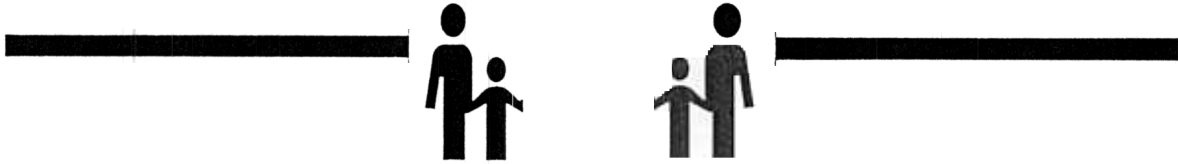
It is critical to maintain intergenerational boundaries and allow children to remain children. They must not be burdened by adult problems. They don't have the coping skills to understand money worries, adult relationship issues or their parent's unhappiness. Children have their own developmental tasks to accomplish and need to be protected from grown-up worries as much as possible. Older or adult children find the necessity to take sides very painful. The option of relationship with either parent is a right, not a privilege.

Transitions

Children often experience high stress when they are moving from parent to parent. They worry about the parent they are leaving, they grieve that their family isn't living together, and they are often asked to report on the life of the parent they just left, which can provoke an unpredictable parental reaction. It's especially important not to argue with the other parent at this time. Interactions should be cordial and relatively brief. Kids should not be asked to carry messages or child support checks back and forth. Parents need to handle issues between themselves, protecting their child's innocence and peace of mind.

Flexibility and Divorce Agreements

While a divorce agreement is necessary and important, a spirit of flexibility and cooperation between parents will affect daily life in important ways. Life throws us many curves and it's impossible to predict them years in advance. We all need extra help from time to time so it's reassuring to know that our partner will lend a hand when necessary. Obviously, this needs to work both ways.

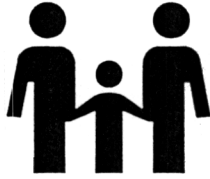


From a Nuclear Family to a Bi-nuclear Family

The notion of a “broken family” is outdated and inaccurate as well as a debilitating orientation. A bi-nuclear setting is created by parental cooperation and encouraging children to be “at home” in two places, without competition or the need to report on the other home.

To Help Children Feel Loved and Protected*

- Spend time with your children, doing with them what *they* like to do.
- Problem-solving time: Listen to your children’s concerns and questions; talk to them about their concerns, and help them solve problems that bother them.
- Reassure your children that it’s not their fault that their parents divorced. Often children feel that their parents divorced because of something they did, or because they were not quite as “good” as they should have been. Explain to them that they are not responsible at all for what happened between their parents.
- Reassure your children that both Mom and Dad still love them and will never abandon them (if this applies).
- Read books about divorce together and talk about the information in the books.
- Take the children’s point of view into account when making decisions that affect their lives.



Adults Need Support

It's important to recognize that we need contact with people who understand our situation and can be supportive and helpful. There are numerous avenues to choose from. Individual psychotherapy, therapy groups, support groups, parenting classes, seminars and workshops on personal growth are all available. Reading related material can be helpful too. For a list of inexpensive support groups, go to www.12StepDivorce.org. For the Parenting Class schedule or a list of good readings on divorce, email or call Micki McWade at Divorce Recovery Resources.

Parenting Through Divorce classes, developed by child psychiatrist, Mark Banschick, MD, and are taught by Micki McWade, CSW. The classes are designed to help parents protect their children and reduce stress for everyone. Please call for more information and the schedule of classes. The sooner the better.

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Micki McWade, CSW, is the author of *Getting Up, Getting Over, Getting On: A Twelve Step Guide to Divorce Recovery and Daily Meditations for Surviving a Breakup, Separation or Divorce*. She is a clinical social worker, group therapist and has a clinical practice with a particular focus on couples and divorce issues. She develops, facilitates and supervises Twelve Step Divorce Recovery Groups and teaches Parenting Through Divorce classes, which help parents recognize and avoid the pitfalls of divorce for children. Micki speaks frequently on the effectiveness of using the Twelve Steps and connecting with others to promote healing from breakups and divorce. She teaches at the State University of New York on the subject of divorce and has been on the faculty of the 2002 National Women Healing Conferences co-sponsored by the Hazelden Foundation and The Betty Ford Center.

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