

- Help the child to express feelings of fear or anger.
- Assure the child that relationships with other important adults in their lives will remain the same.
- Allow the child to mourn the loss of the family as it was before the divorce.
- Support and encourage the child's relationship with the other parent.

Getting Help

While some children cope with the stress of divorce with the help of family and friends, others may benefit from the assistance of a professional counselor.

Be alert for changes in your child's behavior or relationships. Some examples might include:

- Lack of interest in friends or fun activities
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Excessive conflicts with family members
- Unusually rebellious behavior
- Lack of interest in school

If you or someone you know is experiencing problems parenting a child through divorce, the Center for Work and Family Life can help. Professionally trained staff are available for short-term counseling.

HOW DO I CONTACT THE CENTER FOR WORK AND FAMILY LIFE (CWFL)?

If you are a USC staff or faculty member and are interested in scheduling an appointment with a counselor or receiving information regarding resources and referrals, phone the CWFL at (213) 821-0800. If you are an immediate family member of a USC employee, you may also phone the Center directly to request services. CWFL services are available at all USC sites by special appointment.

The Center for Work and Family Life is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

CHILDREN
AND
DIVORCE

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Children and Divorce

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CHILDREN AND DIVORCE

Children and Divorce

Divorce is a painful process for all those involved, parents and children alike. During this very stressful process, children's needs, feelings and concerns sometimes take a backseat to their parents' anger and emotional trauma. Parents must realize that they are still the most important people in their children's lives and that the divorce has at least as much impact on the children as the parents. Parents' ongoing commitment to the children's well-being is vital.

Something to think about...

- Female children from divorced families are five times more likely and male children three times more likely to divorce than children from intact families.
- Adult children of divorce have higher levels of anxiety, have different dating and intimacy styles, are more fearful of commitment, seek psychotherapy more frequently, and have greater feelings of self-blame, anger, frustration, and greater feelings of isolation.
- Adult children of a divorce tend to get married later in life and start their families later. They also tend to look to divorce as a solution to a bad marriage rather than using problem solving skills.

A 10-year research project on children of divorce revealed that the event has a greater impact on children over 12 years of age. The study revealed that 68% of teenagers from divorced families engaged in some type of

illegal or self-destructive activity following divorce – including alcohol or other drug use, theft, and traffic violations. Their level of stress actually rose a year after the divorce.

Children 5 to 8 years of age reported feelings of rejection and a fear of abandonment. Children aged 9 to 12 are apt to be angry with both parents. Many children in this age group have health problems – headaches and stomach aches – and many have difficulty socializing with other children.

For all children, the emotional problems are greater if the children lose contact with one parent.

Children's key feelings during divorce

- Frightened
- Confused
- Threatened
- Responsible for their parents' problems
- Guilty for causing the divorce

Children may begin sacrificing themselves with hopes they can bring their parents back together. They will often misinterpret the divorce and the actions surrounding it unless they are honestly told what is happening, how they are involved and not involved, and what is going to happen to them. If not informed in an honest, open manner, children will create their own answers to unspoken questions about the divorce – answers that can be much more frightening than the actual situation.

With care and attention, children can be helped through this difficult conflict.

Helping a child through a divorce...

Do's and Don'ts

During or following a divorce, you may not be getting along with the other parent. But when it comes to the child, you need to work together for the child's best interests.

If a divorce is handled with the best interest of the child in mind, though, the child will be more resilient and will learn that difficult situations can be resolved in a caring, constructive manner.

Things Not To Do

- Don't lie or cover up what's happening to the family. The first rule is honesty.
- Don't fight in front of the child.
- Don't use the child to carry messages to the other parent.
- Don't worry the child with 'grown-up' legal or financial problems.
- Don't expect emotional support from the child; that's a role for adults – friends, family members, or a therapist.
- Don't pressure the child with adult roles such as "You're the man of the house."
- Don't ask your child to choose who they want to be with.

Things To Do

- Assure the child that he or she will be taken care of.
- Prepare the child for the changes that will take place.
- Convince the child that the divorce wasn't his or her fault.
- Talk to the child. Help him or her work out feelings and perceptions about the divorce.