

HASSENFELD
**CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
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Child Study Center Webinars

Parents' Relationships and Breakups: Impact on Children

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Trends in Marriage

- Age at which people are getting married is increasing
- Other opportunities: cohabitation, domestic partnerships
- Approximately 90% of adults get married

Trends in Divorce

- 40-50 % of people get divorced
- Risks of divorce:
 - Race, age, education, income, religion
 - Childbearing
 - Having a child after marriage decreases risk by up to 66%
 - Desire for children
 - Marriage in which one partner does not want children increases risk by 50%

CDC; National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends 2000-2014



“Divorce is one of the most difficult, life-altering, identity challenging events that could ever happen in one’s life”

The process and aftermath of divorce is a test of coping strategies, mental health, internal strength, and social support.

- Increased rates of depression and anxiety
- Increased rates of happiness, feelings of freedom and awakening, personal growth

Promoting Positive Adult Outcomes

1. Work with your own therapist
2. Seek a good divorce attorney

"Nothing is more important than your children. The first thing a divorce attorney should do is demystify the process. A good attorney can do this by educating you about the law, provide you with available resources for your family, identify your goals in your divorce and help you walk through the process with as minimal impact on your children as possible. Hire someone who understands and has experience in helping you assess what is in the best interests of your children."

- Ashley Tate Cooper, Esq., Weinberg & Cooper, LLC, Hackensack, NJ www.weinbergcooper.com

3. Use your resources : friends, family, colleagues, stress relieving outlets

Child Mental Health and Divorce

- Short term distress possible, long term distress not likely
- Increased rates of:
 - Anxiety: worries, fears, regression & bedtime/toileting problems, difficulty separating
 - Depression: crying, sadness, anger, yelling
 - Behavior problems: noncompliance, oppositionality
- Also important to remember that children whose parents are unhappy also have increased rates of anxiety and depression symptoms, as well.

Telling the Children

H	Honesty throughout the process
E	Emotional response to a minimum
A	Adjust to the change with optimism
R	Reassure them that you love them
T	Time will heal

“We love you very much, and that will never change.

Mommy and Daddy have had some problems in our marriage that we just can't fix. We've decided not to be married anymore. We're getting something called a 'divorce.'

We'll always be a family and love you no matter what, but the way we all live together and spend time together will be changing.

Everything is going to be okay.”

Children's Processing of Divorce

- Current psychological functioning
- Temperament
- Developmental stages
 - Birth to 2
 - Preschool
 - Early Elementary
 - Middle School and High School

"Mommy and Daddy are Getting a Divorce: An Age Based Guide on How to Tell Your Children," Huffington Post, 3/9/16, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ashley-tate-cooper/mommy-daddy-are-getting-a_b_9410038.html

Children's Processing of Divorce: 5 Stages of Loss

Denial/Shock

Anger

Grief/Depression

Bargaining

Acceptance

"How Divorce is Like a Loss for Children: The 5 Stages," Huffington Post, 6/7/2016; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ashley-tate-cooper/how-a-divorce-is-like-a-loss-for-children-the-5-stages_b_10281458.html

Mental Health Concerns to Watch For

- Academic problems
- Friend problems: isolation, neediness, difficulty sharing
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Behavior problems

Child's Risk Index for Divorced or Separated Families (CRI-DS)

	Never	Sometimes	Always
1. Your child has difficulty concentrating			
2. Your child bullies or is cruel or mean to others			
3. Your child is disobedient at school			
4. Your child feels that others are out to get him/her			
5. Your child feels worthless or inferior			
6. Your child lies or cheats			
7. You and your Ex argued about child discipline practices			
8. You and your Ex argued about visitation			
9. You have poor appetite			
10. You feel lonely			
11. You worry too much			
12. The parent who does not live with the child misses many scheduled visits			
13. You seem to see your child's faults more than his/her good points			
14. You don't seem to know what your child needs or wants			
15. You don't have a good time at home with your child			

Tein J, Sandler IN, Braver, SL, Wolchik SA (2013). Development of a brief parent-report risk index for children following parental divorce, Journal of Family Psychology, 27, 6.



Seeking Help for Your Child

- Mental health professional:
 - May be a good idea from the beginning, especially for only children
 - Ongoing, frequent, significant symptoms
- Outlet for negative feelings (e.g., sports, music)
- Drawing
- Journaling
- Acting it out/Role Play

Parenting Suggestions

- **Good parenting is a buffer against negative outcomes**
- Continue use of recommended parenting : warmth and limits
- Create consistent visitation schedule
 - Non-residential parent involvement important
- Continue helpful routines
- Carry over some familiarity across homes
- Schedule a consistent time for questions and answers
- Communicate honestly and directly, and with warmth
- Foster friendships and relationships with siblings for support
- Inform teachers and other adults

Suggestions for Interactions Between Parents

- **Low conflict divorces are best**
- Shield children from your disagreements and frustrations with each other
- Show children you can be civil in front of them
- Communicate about the children directly; don't make them communicate for you
- Be together at events for children if possible
- Support each other as parents

Moving on to New Relationships

- Priority is always the children
- Take appropriate time and care before introducing a child to a significant other
- Typical child responses:
 - Neutral feelings
 - Confusion and anger as kids see their parents betraying the other parent or abandoning them
 - Calmness, ease, health as kids see their parents form new relationships, don't have to worry about them being alone, see them being cared for, new opportunities for more people to care for them
- Setting examples for relationships: love, happiness, healthy communication

Resources

- Child Study Center (office locations: Manhattan, New Jersey, Long Island)
- Sesame Street: Toolkit on Divorce videos
- “Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families,” by Laurie Krasny Brown & Marc Brown
- “Putting Children First: Proven Parenting Strategies for Helping Children Thrive Through Divorce,” by JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, PhD
- Divorce Force app
- Huffington Post - Divorce

Questions?

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Upcoming Child Study Center Webinar



Being Your Child's Champion

Christina Di Bartolo, LMSW

November 15, 2016 @ 1:00pm

Register @ bit.ly/2amRR6j