

NOT SO HAPPILY OR SO MISERABLY EVER AFTER

The simple truth is that few children are unscathed by family breakup; Equally true is that few children are permanently devastated by divorce.

Divorce adjustment turns out to be a complicated process involving many influences. Family, friends, and caregivers should attend to **short-term effects** (immediate custody, moving, etc.) and **long-term effects** (lifestyle, continued custody, etc.). Over the course of adjustment **individual effects** (personal anger, loss, etc.), **relationship effects** (parent-child, peer, parent-parent contexts), and **systemic effects** (school, courts, neighborhood interaction) have an immediate and cumulative impact on children's coping.

Overall, children of divorce—at least at first—tend to have higher rates of physical illness, emotional distress (depression, anxiety, low self-esteem), behavioral problems (conflict, crime, drug abuse), school difficulties, social adjustment (isolation, dating problems, premarital pregnancy). These effects increase dramatically when the economic impact of divorce (single parent income and/or lack of child support) places a child at or near the poverty level. Similarly, prior or ongoing parent hostility increases a child's anxiety and negative behavioral responses.

For some effects, it may depend. Father absence may be a *divorce effect* if dad's emotional and financial involvement *stopped* at separation (otherwise, study must go beyond

children of divorce). The amount of friend or family support can make single parenting a traumatic or a typical stressor. And most of us would prefer one caring parent with a limited income to a wealthy two-parent dysfunctional family. Other factors, such as maintaining residence, child age and temperament, and transitions into remarriage significantly affect a child's experience of divorce.

The complexity of divorce adjustment helps us further appreciate children's resiliency: Consequences are neither inevitable nor all negative. Yet such insights perhaps underline the many and profound effects which can occur. As the quote below suggests, parents, educators, therapists, youth leaders, or friends now have more evidence than ever to avert breakup by improving relationships or invest themselves more intensively if the relationship cannot be maintained.

Before, when parents expressed fears about the effect of divorce on their children, I'd reassure them that their children would be fine. Now I tell them that I think that's a valid concern. I no longer believe that there's a one-to-one relationship between what's good for the parents and what's good for the kid.—Dr. William Doherty, Univ. of MN family therapist (Family Therapy Networker, May/June 1994, p. 21).

ROUNDUP ON THIS EDITION

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PARADOXES:

A PARTING THOUGHT
*Divorce and the Changing of
 Seasons*

*You never really know a man
 until you have divorced
 him.—Zsa Zsa Gabor*

FAMILY LIFE SPECIALIST ADVENTURES

- 9/7 **Crook-Weston Co. Planning Retreat, Mallo Camp.**
Training and discussion on resiliency and its implications for Extension programming and community education.
- 9/13-16 **State POW Meeting, Laramie.**
Issues and priority-setting for 1995-96 programming.
- 9/27-30 **KSU Rural Families Conf., Manhattan, KS.**
Presentation on "Metaphors for Teaching Resiliency" and continuing education on working with rural families.
- 10/14 **"Growing Old in a New Age" Compressed Video**
Statewide broadcast to review PBS/KCWC series, present insights and programs about growing old in Wyoming, and assist students in assignments and questions.
- 10/16-17 **Comp. School Health Conference, Casper.**
UW-CES poster on programs and resources for this school-based health-promotion meeting.
- 10/21 **"How to Talk so Kids Will Listen" Training, Cheyenne.** UW-CES and UPLIFT agency for support and education of families of children with disabilities will present a day-long conference on guidance for professionals and parents.

GOPHER HOLE "Gopher" is a popular name for electronic files accessed via Internet. Both Extension and 4-H (CYFERNET) offer "gophers," as well as universities, government agencies, and private organizations. Newsletters, program information, research, and statistical reports, grant announcements, and much other info appear on menus.

Located on Penn State Extension's MAPPs (PEN PAGES):

GUIDELINES TO MINIMIZE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON CHILDREN--REFERENCE

1. Communicate the following to children:
 - * the separation/divorce is not the fault of the children
 - * the parents will continue to love their children
 - * parents continue to be involved in their children's lives
 - * the children's lives will change because of the divorce
 - * there's nothing children can do to change the situation
2. Allow children to express their feelings
3. Avoid involving children in a triangle of parent conflict
4. Keep hostility between parents in check, especially in front of the children
5. Encourage visitation by the non-custodial parent
6. Keep changes to a minimum - if possible, keep children in the same home, school, and neighborhood
7. Seek professional counseling if necessary

Source: Univ. of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension

DIVORCE AND ADJUSTMENT**"Cut to the Chase"**

PROGRAMMING PRIORITIES FOR HELPING CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

- Prevention:** High school and pre-marriage programs and support services to build relationship skills and reduce the likelihood of divorce can reduce the incidence of crisis.
- Early Intervention in Crisis:** Training, mediation, and support programs to head off family crisis or create smoother transitions once divorce becomes inevitable can reduce the severity of crisis for adults and kids.
- Prioritizing Kids in the Midst of Breakup:** Policy and practice which objectively considers needs of children through mediation, custody, and recovery, including courts, schools, social services, and peers or neighbors' support of kids' adjustment.
- Meeting Developmental Needs of Children** Tailoring programs and interaction with youth to meet their level of knowledge and experience.
- Learning from Experience:** Adjusting helping efforts to meet emerging needs, rather than offering "canned" programs or "one-size-fits-all" responses.

Getting Yourself Together is the Best Help You Can Give Your Children HEALING THE HURTS OF DIVORCE

1. *Do your mourning now (vs. deny, cover up, escape).*
2. *Be gentle with yourself. Don't make the wound worse by self-criticism, regret. Forgiving yourself allows you to learn.*
3. *Set times to relax and heal. Plan times to reflect, talk with friends or therapist, listen to music or see a movie as a conscious part of re-construction.*
4. *If possible, don't take on new responsibilities. Allow time for healing and don't let overactivity become an escape.*
5. *Remember it's normal to feel depressed or angry. Accept these and other feelings and arrange your routine to avoid extremes and use feelings to work through the hurt.*
6. *Avoid romance or entangling relationships which may become escapes from mourning or reactions to broken bonds. Cooperate, but don't try to rekindle the old relationship.*
7. *Carefully monitor nutrition and drug use. New routines and low feelings can lead to unhealthy lifestyle habits.*
8. *Keep a diary or journal to record thoughts and feelings and see progress toward healing.*
9. *Heal at your own pace and avoid comparing your situation to others (divorced or not).*
10. *Maintain substantial and supportive contact with your children at least every four days.*

Source: Colgrove, et al. (1978), cited in Lamanna & Riedmann (1988). *Marriage and Family*, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth and David Fassler, *Boston Globe*, 10/14/93.

Divorce Rate (by state, 1980 to 1992)

	1980	1985	1992
USA	5.2	5.0	4.8
WY	8.5	7.5	6.9

Surrounding states, 1992:

CO (5.6); NE (4.1); SD (4.1); MT (5.2); UT (5.3)
 Counties (see Jan-Feb 1995 Chinook)

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1994). No. 146. Marriages and Divorces-Number and Rate, by State: 1980 to 1992.

Children Impacted by Divorce (USA, 1970 to 1988)

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1988
Est. no. children (1,000s)...	870	1123	1174	1091	1044
Avg. no. children per decree...	1.22	1.08	.98	.92	.89
Rate per 1,000 children < 18yrs.	12.5	16.7	17.3	17.3	16.4

Source: *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (1994). No. 143. Divorce and Annulments-Duration of Marriage, Age at Divorce, and Children Involved: 1970 to 1988.

WY Divorces & Annulments by No. Children Involved

	(Total)	Divorces, with Number of Children Affected					
		0	1	2	3	4	5+
WY	(3,200)	1,353	741	753	246	83	24
Albany	(200)	102	41	44	8	3	2
Big Horn	(60)	25	14	13	5	1	2
Campbell	(209)	89	40	54	17	7	2
Carbon	(120)	52	31	27	7	2	1
Converse	(80)	34	14	21	9	1	1
Crook	(20)	10	4	3	3	-	-
Fremont	(194)	78	41	47	7	8	3
Goshen	(68)	24	15	19	6	4	-
Hot Sps.	(35)	15	7	9	3	-	1
Johnson	(35)	12	6	8	7	1	1
Laramie	(590)	267	158	116	36	11	2
Lincoln	(63)	22	13	21	6	1	-
Natrona	(485)	194	115	117	49	9	1
Niobrara	(23)	8	6	7	-	1	1
Park	(146)	62	37	34	9	3	1
Platte	(45)	13	16	13	1	2	-
Sheridan	(169)	79	33	40	12	5	-
Sublette	(32)	13	10	7	1	1	-
S'water	(300)	122	64	75	29	7	3
Teton	(85)	41	20	19	1	4	-
Uinta	(148)	65	32	29	14	7	1
Washakie	(64)	18	16	21	4	3	2
Weston	(29)	8	8	9	2	2	-

Source: *WY Vital Statistics* (1992). Cheyenne: WY Dept. of Health, p. 86.

A Sample of Divorce Rates Worldwide, 1960 & 1986 (per 1,000 married women)

	1960	1986
United States.....	9.2	21.2
Canada.....		1.8 12.9
Japan.....		3.6 5.4
France.....		2.9 8.3
Sweden*.....		5.0 11.7

Source: Ray Marshall. (1990). *The State of Families* 3. Milwaukee: Family Service America, p. 142.

*couple breakup rate higher due to high cohabitation rate

Redivorce Rate (Caucasians, by percent, 1990)

20-24 yrs: 13.1; 25-29 yrs: 17.8; 30-34 yrs: 22.7; 35-39 yrs: 28.5; 40-44 yrs: 30.6; 45-49 yrs: 36.5; 50-54 yrs: 34.5

Source: Census Bureau, *Current Pop. Reports*, p. 23-180

Child Support Enforcement (1993)

	Total Caseload	Active Caseload	Pct. Cases w/Collection	
USA	16,918,660	3,072,435	18.2%	
WY	27,937	4,041	14.5%	Rank: 40

Surrounding states (Percent Collection, 1993):

CO (14.0); NE (19.9); SD (28.7); MT (22.7); UT (21.9)

Source: Children's Defense Fund. (1995). *The State of America's Children* 1995. Washington, DC: CDF.

Years to Remarriage, for Females (by percent, 1988)

	1	2	3	4	5	Total
White	21.9	35.2	43.5	49.4	53.0	59.9
Black	10.9	16.5	19.6	22.7	25.0	34.0
Hispanic	12.5	16.6	22.7	27.8	29.9	44.7

Source: *Census Bureau, Current Pop. Reports* p. 23-180

Comments Related to Effects of Divorce on Children

"Single parent families are six times more likely to be poor than married-couple families with children."--National Comm. on America's Urban Families, *Families First* (1991)

"...only 51% of mothers who were entitled to child support received the full amount, 25 percent received partial payment, and 23 percent received nothing at all."--*Sylvia Hewlett, When the Bough Breaks* (1991, Basic Bks (p. 89)

"...the percentage of black youth who will live with one parent for some period of time prior to age 18 may be as high as 94%, while for white children the corresponding figure is 70%."--*Sandra Hofferth. (1985). Updating children's life course. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47, 93-115.*

**It is Your Business
WHAT WORKPLACES CAN DO
TO REDUCE DIVORCE
AND FACILITATE DIVORCE ADJUSTMENT**

1. **Enforce sexual harrasment law.** Dissatisfaction with marriage may explain why employees become more willing to engage in harrasment or infidelity, but it does not justify their coercion of others.
2. **Discourage illicit fraternization.** On-the-job friendships can facilitate productivity and mental health. Emotional and sexual liasons often encourage gossip or jealousy and erode family support for a worker and teamwork among co-workers. Informal boss/peer pressures work best.
3. **Promote marriage enrichment.** Programs for executive couples facilitated adjustment and improved workplace attitudes in the military and in industry, according to social work professor Gary Bowen (*Navigating the Marital Journey*, Praeger Pub., 1992).
4. **Offer employee assistance counseling.** Confidential counseling and educational services, including family issues and available to family members, may prevent or remediate crises which could reduce productivity or result in termination of a skilled, loyal employee.
5. **Create family-friendly policies.** Flexible hours, health coverage for family members (with or without custody), and family leave time (for court dates or school involvement) which help persons be effective at home will probably help them be more effective at work, too.
6. **Expand employee training.** Educational programs on communication, problem-solving, and mutual support directed at employee effectiveness can also apply lessons to supporting co-workers through personal crises. The KSU Extension program, "Friends Indeed," might be an ideal resource for this purpose.

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After years of advising other people on their personal problems, I was stunned by my own divorce. I only wish I had someone to write to for help.
.....
-Ann Landers

WHAT TO TELL THE KIDS?

- 1) Tell clearly and be prepared to repeat the news;
 - 2) Describe your attempts to protect and improve marriage;
 - 3) Emphsize both parents will continue to love and care;
 - 4) Do not assess blame;
 - 5) Try to describe day-to-day changes kids may face;
 - 6) Emphasize that the children didn't cause the divorce;
 - 7) Assume children will always be free to love both parents;
 - 8) Encourage questions throughout divorce and adjustment;
 - 9) Parents should both be there to tell;
 - 10) All children should be told at the same time;
 - 11) Parents should stress that the decision was rational and with regret. Sadness gives children permission to cry.
- Source: M.McKay, et al. (1984). *The Divorce Book* New Harbinger.

**Reaching Kids and Parents:
WHAT CHILDCARES & SCHOOLS CAN DO**

Young Children (0-8 yrs.)

- * Children want teachers to know and understand
- * Teachers who stay in touch with parents or ask about child behavior (i.e., anger, sadness, "spacing out") are not "nosy"
- * Teachers can support and help healing by:
 1. Listening empathically, tuning in to feelings:
Ex: "It's hard, isn't it?"
 2. Maintaining a consistent environment:
Ex: "I know you feel angry, but we use words, not fists."
 3. Providing some flexibility to fit child/family needs:
Ex: Finding time to meet each parent.
 4. Providing activities appropriate to a child's level of development and supportive of emotional expression:
Ex: dramatic play, creative art, music, movement
 5. Use of children's books about divorce and single parent families to promote adjustment and normalize experience.
- * Teachers must accept that they cannot solve all problems

Source: Barry B. Frieman. (1993). Separation and divorce: Children want their teachers to know. *Young Children*, 48, (6), 58-63.

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Older Children (9-18 yrs.)

- * Be flexible, but sustain rules, routines, and relationships on which the child can depend.
- * Acknowledge hurt, but not acting out behaviors.
- * Be sensitive to changes in moods or behavior which may indicate high stress or drug use.
- * Teachers and counselors can offer a listening ear, but should not express anxious concern or press self-disclosure.
- * When children self-disclose, counselors can show empathy or promote problem-solving without being judgmental or permissive. Issues of attachment, concentration and school performance, sexual and other behavior control may be problematic. Children bounce back most consistently in an environment of support with responsibility for self.
- * Teachers' listening and constructive outlets for helping (classroom chores, mentoring peers, creative projects) can affirm and engage children's energies. Extremes of behavior or intent (i.e., mention of suicide) may be bases for referral.
- * Maintain open and supportive communication with both parents, if possible. Adjust consultation and meeting schedules to accommodate a single parent's work schedule.
- * Sponsor peer support groups and teach mutual support skills such as empathic listening.

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The vast majority of children who experience life in single-parent families and stepfamilies do well in later life.

-Frank Furstenberg, Univ. of PA divorce researcher

Many Divorces: at all Stages of Children's Development*

Three to Five Years

- Marked silence during play
- Fear of abandonment
- Bewilderment and sadness
- Worry about causing the divorce
- Clinging behavior, esp. at bedtime
- Regressive behavior

Six to Eight Years

- Better ability to grasp cause and effect of situation
- Pervasive sadness
- Crying (esp. in boys)
- Unrealistic fantasies
- Denial
- Marked rise in or inhibition of aggressive behavior
- Guilt
- Hunger for affection and physical contact with adults
- Feelings of deprivation (w/r food, toys, etc.)
- Increase in mastery play
- Yearning for or inhibition of anger at departed parent
- Anger with custodial parent (mostly in boys)
- Denial of feelings of responsibility in causing divorce
- Fantasy about reconciliation with parents
- Loyalty conflicts

Nine to Twelve Years

- Increased external show of poise, courage
- Diffuse feelings of anxiety
- Realistic perception of family disruption
- Constant body motion
- Shame over what is happening
- Covering up of feelings
- Mastery of feelings through activity and play
- Anger at the parent who they blame for the divorce
- Shaken sense of identify
- Somatic symptoms (headaches, stomachaches, etc.)
- Alignment with one parent

Thirteen to Eighteen Years

- Premature independence from parents, less family contact
- Worry about sex and marriage
- Mourning (profound sense of loss)
- Anger (at both parents and parents' new partners)
- Perceptions of parents as fallen idols or instant saints
- Temporary or prolonged delay of entrance to adolescence
- Pseudo adolescent behavior (i.e., sexual acting out)
- Loyalty conflicts

Source: Majorie J. Kostelnik, Laura C. Stein, Alice Phipps Whiren, & Anne K. Soderman. (1993). *Guiding Children's Social Development*. Second Edition. Albany, NY: Delmar.

*Data compiled from multiple clinical and research reports. Reactions are typical for stage but not generalizable to every child or every point in the adjustment process.

However often marriage is dissolved, it remains indissoluble.
Real divorce, the divorce of heart and nerve and fiber, does not exist, since there is no divorce from memory. -Virginia Peterson

Many Divorces: Experiences of Divorce in Parents' Adjustment

Phases of Divorce (successive or simultaneous, 1-3+ yrs.)

1. Emotional Divorce: distancing or conflict associated with loss of attachment, affection, satisfaction
2. Legal Divorce: grounds for divorce; terms of separation.
3. Economic Divorce: finances and property settlement.
4. Coparental Divorce: child custody and visitation experiences, management of single-parent home.
5. Community Divorce: change of community and friendship patterns. Readjustment or establishing new ties. *****

When word gets out that you've broken up, it's as if you have a disease and none of your friends wants to catch it.

-Divorced father, quoted by divorce researcher Gay Kitson

6. Psychic Divorce: regaining individual autonomy and identity, self-confidence and a new routine.

Emotional effects of divorce noted by Bohannon (1971):

- * Feelings of having failed in an important life task...of rejection and being unloveable...of self-recrimination
- * Feelings of regret and thoughts of "what might have been"...of intense loneliness and lost identity
- * Feelings of grief and depression...of anger, frustration, inadequacy
- * Irrational thoughts and behaviors such as uncontrollable crying, self-defeating one-night stands, excessive drinking, homicidal or suicidal thoughts, and obsessive "reunion fantasies"

Source: Paul Bohannon. (1971). The six stations of divorce. In P. Bohannon, *Divorce and After*. (29-55). NY: Doubleday.

OTHER RESEARCH ON EFFECTS ON PARTNERS

Economic Consequences:

One year after divorce, the standard of living for divorced men rose 42%, while that of divorced women fell 73%

-Lenore Weitzman. (1985). *The Divorce Revolution*. NY: Free Press (a study of no-fault divorce effects in CA)

Psychological and Emotional Consequences

Higher incidence of motor vehicle accidents, disease morbidity and mortality, alcoholism, suicide, homicide.

Other Consequences:

At least one move to a smaller, cheaper residence, often in a higher-risk neighborhood further from past supports.

Lack of concentration or energy and practical problems (single parenting schedule, longer commute) at work .

Loneliness and dislocation, typically 1-3 yrs. after divorce.

Lack of norms, role models; strains in single parent role.

-Helen J. Rashke. (1987). Divorce. In M.B. Sussman & S.K. Steinmetz (Eds.) *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*(pp. 597-624) NY: Plenum.

RESEARCH ON DIVORCE EFFECTS

Just Awful: Pessimism on Long-term Adjustment

Therapist/researcher's Judith Wallerstein's review (*American Journal of Family Law*, 5, 3, 211-237) of long-term divorce effects is not optimistic. Noting difficulties in researching childhood trauma and non-intact families; measurement and design problems with multi-stage, multi-dimensional events; differences in divorcing populations; and impacts of divorce trends on individuals and society, she goes on to review several long-term studies:

The Long-term Prospective Study, Berkeley, CA derived from Block et al.'s 10 yr. personality/cognitive research study (interview and survey). Divorcing families had a pattern of non-support (esp. of dads) and/or parent conflict (esp. w/r dad's role) reflected in boys' impulsiveness after divorce.

VA Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage by Hetherington, et al. matched a divorced and non-divorced set of middle class families of 4 yr.-olds over six years. Observations, diaries, interviews, and surveys identified high emotional stress (high mother and child irritability, declining attention, household disarray, erratic discipline) and behavior problems among children in the aftermath of legal divorce. The six-year follow-up found parent-son conflicts in single parent and parent-child conflicts early in remarried families. Children of divorce were overrepresented in maladaptive (aggressive, insecure, impulsive), opportunistic/competent (curious, energetic, manipulative), and caring/competent (warm, compassionate, open) child types, with differences credited to varying and interacting perceptions and resources.

Wallerstein's CA Children of Divorce Study, using clinical observations, interviews and surveys of 131 normal middle class children ages 3-18 over 15 yrs. At five years, adjustment was closely tied to nurturant (non-conflicted) family, regardless of age or gender. At 10 yrs., teens were typically OK in school and family/peer/work roles, although sad about the breakup, and sometimes fantasizing reconciliation. Many were troubled, drifting, underachieving, fearing failure, commitment, and abandonment. At 15 yrs., many were in therapy working through relationship issues (past and present) with parents and partners. In spite of troubles, over half became compassionate, competent adults.

Johnston's Children in Postseparation and Divorce Disputes. Of 100 children, 1-12 yrs. exposed to intense physical/verbal abuse and parent conflict, symptoms of fear of abandonment, withdrawal, and anxiety/pessimism (not aggression) were frequent, intense, and long-lasting, with depression, manipulative behavior, and aggression increasing with age.

Stanford Adolescent Custody Study found kids (10-18 yrs) often felt caught in custody disputes, but 40% were able to maintain emotional distance (esp. w/mom support) and make the best of dual residence, avoiding depression, anxiety, and deviance of more vulnerable peers.

Furstenberg's National Survey of Children found kids ages 7-11 in marital breakups displayed more behavior, academic, and psychological problems than kids from intact families, across a variety of situations; that younger children were impacted most; boys and girls equally. Several family transitions and father absence increased risks, while mother support (not necessarily joint custody) provided a protective factor.

Guidubaldi's National Study of Children in the Schools found social, behavioral, and academic differences between school-age children from intact and divorced families, especially for boys and lower income kids.

Glenn's Large-Scale Survey of Adult Populations revealed significant negative effects of divorce (esp. for girls) extending into adult status and well-being. Children of divorce were more likely to divorce with trends related to their earlier ages of and lower commitment to marriage.

Not That Bad: Qualifying the Negative Picture

David Demo and Alan Acock's (*Journal of Marriage and the Family*, August 1988, pp. 619-648) research review challenges the negative picture of divorce effects. They note that research often focuses on: 1) father absence for children (not teens); 2) only a few well-being factors; 3) structural (intact, single-parent) but not functional (healthy, troubled) categories; and 4) comparisons of of age groups which make conclusions on developmental effects (vs. tracking the same children over time). They cite an overall pattern suggesting temporary negative effects on personal adjustment (i.e., self-control, leadership, responsibility, independence, achievement orientation, aggressiveness, gender-role orientation), especially for preschoolers (vs. teens), with problems more typical of parent conflict, low support, and male gender (though girls from intact families had fewer problems and children of divorce were less gender-stereotyped). Divorce appears to depress self-esteem temporarily, although changes in specific dimensions are largely unstudied. Parental conflict inhibits cognitive functioning, but financial hardship, anxiety, low parent-child interaction more often decrease school performance than does breakup, per se. After a period of adjustment (often involving a move and new peers), children of divorce are typically socially readjusted. Findings on dating are mixed, but early onset of sexual activity (as with antisocial behaviors) appears to be one consequence of parental deviance and limited supervision. The authors note that negative effects may be long-term or indirect.

Out of the Clouds: TheoryBase for Divorce Education

Two theories offer different angles on research and practice. The **Stress-Coping-Vulnerability Model** emphasizes inborn or learned traits of the child, family, or social context which interact to increase vulnerability or protect from distress over time. Helping both children and parents appraise events as learning opportunities and gain mastery (esteem, sense of control) as well as affirm and use their own and external (emotional and practical) resources are seen as critical for adjustment. Coping (managing internal and external demands) of children or adults can be aided by: 1) Teaching problem-solving (managing or modifying stress sources via perspective-taking, reframing, decision-making); 2) Teaching emotion-control (regulating stressful emotions); 3) Improving available resources (health, energy, positive beliefs, problem-solving, social skills, social support, material resources) and/or 4) Reducing constraints to re-source use such as poor scheduling or judgmental listening.

Psychoanalytic-Clinical Theory in Neil Kalter's work views divorce effects by focusing on barriers to children's typical development: abilities to 1) regulate aggression; 2) even-tually separate from caregivers; and 3) establish gender identity via affirmation and problem solving skill building for adults and children (esp. females). Wallerstein sees the parent's key tasks as: 1) ending marriage civilly; 2) mourning loss; 3) reclaiming self; 4) resolving emotions; 5) venturing forth; 6) rebuilding; and 7) helping children. Children need: 1) understanding of divorce; 2) strategic withdrawal; 3) loss-coping; 4) anger mgt.; 5) guilt-coping; 6) accepting permanence of divorce; and 7) willingness to risk intimacy themselves. The duration, intensity, and extent of emotions and behaviors short of this healing is believed to predict later anxieties and problems.

No Longer Partners But Still Parents

CUSTODY ISSUES

Most studies show that parent and child adjustment is aided by limited conflict before, during, and after divorce. Conflict attitudes (I win-you lose; revenge orientation) and tactics (criticism, sarcasm, defensiveness, verbal and physical violence) can derail marital romance and may disrupt parenting contacts.

In the process of litigating legal conditions of divorce, custody (dates, hours, costs), and visitation, parents can benefit from setting informal ground rules which do not **triangulate** or trap the child between competing interests and conflicting emotions.

Sample ground rules include:

1. Communication on a regular, rational, (and in case things get irrational) separate-from-children basis about the child's needs and growth. Triangulation
2. Flexibility in time spent with children to accommodate emergencies or special events.
3. Avoiding destructive criticism about past or present differences in opinion, lifestyle, or actions.
4. Sharing of information about children's activities and interests which will facilitate the child's enjoyment of both parents.

Divorce mediation (see *Chinook*, Nov. '94, p.7) provides professional direction to set rules and talk out issues civilly (partners could quickly spend as much on adversarial lawyers) after custody is determined. Robert Emery, in *Renegotiating Family Relationships* (1994, Guilford) outlines steps of the mediation process which may help parents work through issues of custody and visitation:

- 1) Contract to mediate and set ground rules for decisions;
- 2) Identify issues, disputes, common interests, emotions;
- 3) Explore options and underlying issues;
- 4) Regularly redefine issues, goals, viewpoints, decisions;
- 5) Focus on issues (beginning with small ones) rather than emotions and parent vs. spouse roles;
- 6) Allow time and freedom to brainstorm alternatives, rather than trying to come to a quick decision;
- 7) Focus on interests (emphasizing child's), not positions;
- 8) Experiment with and refine solutions and decision-making processes rather than getting stuck in one option.

You never realize how short a month is until you pay alimony.

-John Barrymore

It's the Law

PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES

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My 1994 survey on the use of W.S. 20-2-113(m) and 1994 W.R.C.P Rule 40 requiring divorcing parents to attend classes on lessening the impact of divorce on children found *3 judges (in Laramie, using mental health center; Jackson, via videotape; & Thermopolis, not identified) did so.

*Three judges agreed classes should be required in all divorces involving minor children, 3 others would if parent disagreements were serious, 2 others for custody agreement modifications, others in special cases or did not respond.

*Six believed effects of divorce courses were somewhat useful, 3 saw them as very useful, while others judged on a case-by-case basis or had little/no experience with courses.

*Four of 12 judges had cases assigned to mediation (3 by the court, 2 by parties' request).

*Nine judges recommended retired judges as mediators, 4 active judges, and 4 retired justices, while 10 felt "other qualified persons" could serve as mediators.

*Ten judges recommended training in mediation techniques, 8 said child issues/needs, 7 named family dynamics and 7 family law, while 4 each cited domestic violence and information gathering. None recommended "no training."

*Nine judges felt non-binding mediation of custody disputes would be very or somewhat beneficial, while 1 said "not beneficial."

*Comments ranged from "Who will pay?" to notes that district court judges do mediation informally already, to suggestion of a "family court" system, to a note that a "guardian ad-litem" (child advocate lawyer) and classes help in his court., to the conviction that divorce rates must be reduced and that partners rarely are able to put children first in working out an agreement.

***Litigation Costly.** *Divorce litigation occupies a large percentage of court dockets, costing time and money.*

***Mediation Trends.** *National legal standards for mediation do not require specific training EXCEPT for work with children and families. In WY, three key reforms advocated by family law practitioners: 1) est. family court system; 2) est. a Alternate Dispute Resolution section in the Bar; 3) est. a Children and the Law section in the Bar Association. Cost is a major factor in instituting mediation. Since legislated and court discretionary funds are limited, including course or mediation costs in divorce filing fees may be an option.*

***Grandparent Visitation.** *According to WY Supreme Court decision (Michael & Michael vs. Hertzler), 8/4/95 the state grandparent visitation statute (allowing grandparents under certain circumstances to petition for visitation rights over the objection of a parent) is constitutional.*

Divorce is a game played by lawyers.
(Vanessa is one notable exception)

-Cary Grant

**Time to Heal:
SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS
HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
ADJUST TO DIVORCE**

Children of Divorce Parenting Intervention (CDPI)

Developed by the Program for Prevention Research at Arizona State University, CDPI is based on a theory of intervention drawn from research on children's adjustment to divorce. In this framework, environmental or interpersonal factors (quality of child-custodial parent relations, amount of child-non-custodial parent contact, negative divorce events, support from non-parental adults, and discipline strategies), intrapersonal resources (reasoning skills, locus of control, beliefs about divorce, coping abilities) key to adjustment. Child-focused programs have limited effects due to design and implementation flaws or context factors out of trainers' control. CDPI targeted and screened for single mothers (divorced 2-24 mo.) with high-risk children (high mother-child and divorce-related conflict; but not including depression). Ten of 46 control group subjects dropped, as did 14 of 48 intervention parents; the latter attended or made up all of the 10 training sessions (skill demo and practice, lecture, discussion, and homework on discipline strategies, listening skills, anger management) rating trainers and their own skill application positively.

Researchers examined child and parent change pre- and post-program. Results for child measures on mediating factors were: On acceptance/rejection, significant treatment effects for children with high (not low) pretest scores; negative divorce events significantly lower for intervention parents with the highest pre-participation rates (but not for parent conflict, father contact, or discipline consistency). Children of participants received less support from non-parental adults, perhaps because of increasing parent time. On parent measures of mediators, the intervention group scored significantly higher post-test on quality of communication, positive routines, acceptance/rejection, and control. Participants with low (but not high) consistency of discipline at pre-test scored significantly higher than poor consistency non-participants. The same pattern was evident for negative divorce events and interparental conflict, suggesting that program most benefitted those most distressed. The program group also gained more positive attitudes toward father time and ability in parenting, although father-child contact did not increase. On outcome variables, children of program group parents became lower in aggression, although no higher on anxiety, conflict disorder, and depression. Improvements in mother-child relationship indirectly, but most dramatically, impacted the number and intensity of behavior problems. Time-per-topic and external interference affected the degree of impact on specific measures of interaction.

Source: Sharlene Wolchik, et al. (1993). *The Children of Divorce Parenting Intervention*. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 21 (3), 293-329.

The Families in Transition Program of Louisville, KY is a court-mandated 6-7 hr. comprehensive local program for parents and children (8-16 yrs., in groups of 15-20), with additional follow-up options. Based on Wallerstein et al.'s (1980) six tasks of adjustment, designed to reduce child anxiety, aggression, and behavioral problems and increase social competencies (via self-awareness, skills, and practical knowledge). Special meetings are arranged for non-custodial parents. Trained facilitators seek to reduce risks and symptoms by tuning in to child age and gender, pre-divorce family functioning, post-divorce parent-child and adult-adult relations, and support systems. Parent curriculum includes: 1) Understanding children's divorce-related concerns; 2) Responding appropriately to concerns; and 3) Developing a co-parental relationship. Children's units feature: 1) Understanding and changing misperceptions about divorce; 2) Coping with anger about divorce; and 3) Coping skills for dealing with divorce. Evaluation indicates FIT graduates adjusting after 6-12 mo.; 89% satisfied/very satisfied, 60% willing to attend follow-ups.

Source: Joe H. Brown, et al. (1994). *Families in Transition: A court-mandated divorce adjustment program for parents and children*. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 45 (1), 27-32.

Newsletters for Divorcing Parents

IL moms (esp. longer-separated) reported newsletters over 8 mo. on esteem, loneliness, time mgt., support, stress, budgeting, credit, job search, shared parenting, child adjustment, child care, and discipline were helpful for adjusting but did not change well-being or parenting practices (and without other support services resulted in adverse change).

Source: Robert Hughes, Jr. et al. (1994). *An evaluation of a newsletter intervention for divorced mothers*. *Family Relations*, 43, 298-304.

Children First Program

A 2-session court-mandated video/discussion program to sensitize divorcing parents to children's needs was rated as helpful, motivated parents to seek community resources, and reduced perceived child-stressing conflicts, especially between highly-conflicted spouses. Stages of adjustment to divorce and problems with custody were typical of program and control group families.

Source, L. Kramer & C.A. Washo. (1993). *Evaluation of a court-mandated prevention program for divorcing parents*. *Family Relations*, 42, 179-186.

Orientation for Divorcing Parents Program (ODP)

Few significant gains were found for a 5 wk/10 hr program for divorcing parents, but insights on client selection, format, content, and methods are invaluable for program planners.

Source: Cheryl C. Buehler, et al. (1992). *Description and evaluation of the Orientation for Divorcing Parents: Implications for postdivorce prevention programs*. *Family Relations*, 41, 154-162.

**Facilitating Adjustment:
RESOURCES FOR
HELPING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
ADJUST TO DIVORCE**

Helping Children Succeed After Divorce, (1991), Children's Hospital Guidance Centers/Divorce Services, 595 Copeland Mill Rd., Westerville, OH 43081 (614-794-2145) provides practical information and discussion forum for: 1) Divorce Experience for Adults (decision to divorce, stages, emotions, psychological tasks); 2) Divorce Experience for Children (how to tell, child responses, risks, guides to professional help & promoting child success); 3) Co-Parental Relations (barriers to cooperation, games, negative intimacy, role changes, tasks of co-parenting, skills to co-parent); 4) Solving Problems (using legal system, mediation).

Special Friends, a 6-12 yr.-old children's comic book and adult/parent guide series for single parent families by Family Life Spc. Robert Hughes Jr. (Univ. of IL CES, 528 Bevier Hall, 905 S. Goodwin, Urbana, IL 61801) offers insights on esteem, feelings, loss, anger, friendship, kindness, and adjusting to change for distribution or discussion.

Supportive Connections: Rural Communities and Single Parent Families, Robert Hughes, Jr. et al (order via Mary Temke, 123 Taylor Hall, UNH CES, Durham, NH 03824 (603-862-2493) provides comprehensive teaching units on community awareness, parenting (adjustment, finances, stress mgmt., support), and youth (parent relations, friendship, communication, and problem solving) and includes bulletins such as "Thinking About Divorce" (UMass CES) and "The Fudge-it Budget Book (Penn State CES) for use as detailed teaching or resource units in limited support rural settings.

Shared Custody: Increasing Benefits and Reducing Strains, Sue Doescher and Jan Hare, Oregon State University Extension Service (OSU Publications Orders, Ag Communications, Administrative Services A422, Corvallis, OR 97331-2119), November 1994. This 4 page (\$.75) bulletin emphasizes three keys to children's adjustment: 1) Effective parent functioning; 2) No parent conflict; and 3) Children's positive relationships with both parents, discusses the ideal of cooperative parenting and the alternative of parallel parenting, and offers suggestions for two-home parenting: 1) Providing a safe routine and close relationship for child; 2) Keeping to a consistent schedule; 3) Avoiding "weekend-only parenting;" 4) Help maintain parent-child connections; 5) Help both parents to connect with schools; 6) Allow children to express feelings; 7) Create rituals to ease transitions between homes.

Diane Vaughn. (199). *Uncoupling*. examines attitudes/skills of self-awareness and disclosure critical to avoiding or mediating painful disengaging processes.

Good books for professionals:

+ Wallertstein, Judith; & Blakeslee, Sandra. (1989). *Second Chances*. NY: Ticknor & Fields.--clinical/longitudinal reports of resiliency and trouble in the aftermath of divorce.
+ Kalter, Neil. (1990). *Growing Up with Divorce*. NY: Free Press.--stage-by-stage explanations of children's reactions how help them make the most of unwelcomed challenges.

Good books on divorce for parents:

+ Bienenfeld, Florence. (1987). *Helping Your Child to Succeed After Divorce*. Hunter House.
+ Ricci, Isolina. (1981). *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Shared Custody Work*. MacMillan.
+ Smoke, Jim. (1986). *Growing Through Divorce*. Harvest House.
+ Visher, John & Emily. (1982). *How to Win as a Stepfamily*. W.W. Norton.

Books for preschoolers (5-7 yrs.)

+ Boegehold, B. (1975). *Daddy Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. Western Publishing.
+ Brown, L. & M. (1986). *Dinosaurs Divorce*. Little, Brown
+ Rogers, Fred & O'Brien, Claire. (1988). *Mr. Rogers Talks with Families about Divorce*. Berkley.

Books for school-age children (8-12 yrs.):

+ Gardner, R.A. (1970). *The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce*. Bantam.
+ Ives, S.B.; Fassler, D.; & Lash, M. (1985). *The Divorce Workbook & My Kind of Family*. Waterfront Books.
+ Lebowitz, M.L. (1989). *I Think Divorce Stinks*. Advocate.

Books for teens (12+ yrs.):

+ Richards, Arlene & Willis, Irene. (1976). *How to Get It Together When Your Parents are Coming Apart*. Bantam.
+ Rofes, E. (1981). *The Kid's Book of Divorce*. Lewis.

The Children and Divorce Resource Network (6881 Beechmont Ave, Cincinnati, OH 45230; 513-231-7205) has developed resources and training for separated/divorced parents, children of divorce, family service workers, schools, mediation, professional training, and community awareness. A resource directory, newsletter and conference are planned.

Media Moments

"What I Didn't Do" (Steve Wariner, 1991) is a thought-provoking reflection on neglect as a factor in divorce for adults. Barbara Mandrell's 1988 classic "Child Support" may inspire some intense discussion on economic and emotional issues in the aftermath of divorce.
Movies like "Kramer vs. Kramer" (1979) and "Mrs. Doubtfire" (1993) present the practical and emotional dilemmas of divorce and custody for parents, but tend to oversimplify adjustments of children (a theme worth reflecting upon with a recovery group).

PARADOXES: A PARTING THOUGHT ***Divorce and the Changing of Seasons***

As Summer turns to Autumn, slopes and meadows fade from green to gold and orange. A chill in the wind, whistling instead of humming lazily, marks a change in the cycles of birth, growth, death, and rebirth. Reflecting on this Indian Summer reverie, turn for a moment to an analogy between Nature and human development, with lessons for understanding divorce and other experiences of brokenness and loss.

Scientists tell us that aspens turn color as cooler weather and the angle of the sun affects photosynthesis and signals a change in growing conditions. Fall brings a new set of stresses to the green tree, just as the cooling (and/or overheating) of an intimate relationship forces adaptation of family members. In a divorce, the paradoxes, or contradictory truths, of change are these:

- * Breakup is **not** an inevitable outcome of relationship cycles, although there may be seasons of affection, conflict, and disinterest in marriages.
- * Change may be seen to "bring out one's true colors" (red hot temper, a case of the blues) or losing one's true color (green)...our own interpretation may make the difference in whether we respond to such a one in support or judgment.

Aspens, like families, grow in systems with shared roots--that's why patches of orange burst from a sea of yellow. Drought, poor soil, fire, frost--what touches one affects all, since they are interconnected. Shade, sharing of resources--even within the same family, some members benefit or suffer more than others because they are connected.

- * Family stress is most distressing since the source of support is often a member who is reeling from the same wound--or worse, the one who delivered the wound.
- * Younger members' fewer needs and naivety may cause them to be more vulnerable; but fewer reserves and distance from the taproot may cause them to suffer most.

Sadness for lost Summer twinges awe in Autumn's emerging beauty. Like many children of divorce, our longing for something which cannot be restored distorts our view and growth into the future.

- * Noting the signs and letting go of trouble is critical to growth and new opportunity; yet the challenges found in a season are more often chronic than unique.
- * Brokenness or death births emptiness and lethargy, but as it does no good to wish for the past, a partner, a child, a friend can only learn from the Winter look for the Spring.

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***Never does Nature say one thing
and wisdom another.***

--Juvenal

***Parents learn a lot from their
children about coping with life.***

Muriel Spark

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