

PARENT EDUCATION
THE “COMPETENT” DIVORCE

PROTECT YOUR CHILD’S MENTAL HEALTH DURING DIVORCE:

- Avoid stigmatizing the divorce and single-parent status.
- Reduce parental conflicts.
- Keep children out of parental fights. Children should not be pressured to take sides.
- Maintain family rituals. Birthdays and holidays provide an important sense of security to the child.
- Maintain stable, loving relationships with both parents. Keep dependable visiting patterns.
- Keep rules and chores that are appropriate to the child’s age.
- The temptation to confide in your child about the divorce will be great. At all cost, avoid criticizing the other parent in front of the child.
- Maintain effective parenting. Definition: good rapport with open communication, a stable predictable environment, and clear rules.
- Build a strong system of family and friends to support the single parent.
- Establish friendly cooperating after the divorce. Children do better when parents put aside their differences to focus on the children’s needs.
- At different ages, children have different emotional responses to divorce. Parents need to plan parenting arrangements to fit the child’s needs.
- The parent’s sense of well-being is a good predictor of the child’s future adjustment. Take care of yourself emotionally.
- Provide adequate financial support for your child.
- Get counseling support for yourself and your child.

REMEMBER.....

As a parent you can *minimize* the impact of divorce on children by *not involving* them in adult disputes and by making sure they have warm, reliable, and stable relationships with *both parents*. With a good co-parenting relationship, you can tailor the custody and visitation to fit the child’s age and individual needs.

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SIGNS OF TROUBLE IN YOUR CHILD OR TEEN:

YOUNG CHILD:

- Sleeping or eating disturbance
- School problems
- Problems with peers
- Fearfulness
- Stealing
- Tantrums
- Extreme sadness
- Aggressiveness and behavior problems
- Regression to more childish behaviors, (for example, extreme clinging behavior, bedwetting, or loss of toilet training)

PRETEEN OR TEEN:

Any of the above plus.....

- Eating disorders (anorexia or bulimia)
- Drug or alcohol use
- Defiance of authority
- Withdrawal from family
- Sudden change in peer group
- Shoplifting
- Police problems
- Running away or threatening to run away
- Sexual acting out

REMEMBER.....

If you notice any of the above signs of emotional distress, and they persist for more than a month or two, it is best to seek counseling support for yourself and your child.

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

- **Kids’ Turn:** This organization offers educational support groups for parents and kids from divorcing families. Children’s groups are age-specific. Groups meet locally. Fees on a sliding scale. Call (415) 437-0700.

- **Mediation:** Participation in mediation is a very effective way to avoid an adversarial divorce. This can be especially helpful to children. Be sure to find a trained, certified and experienced mediator (it’s a special skill). Call **Family Court Services** at (925) 957-7950 or **FLAR (Family Law Alternative Resolution) Program** at **Contra Costa Bar Ass.** at (925) 825-5700.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

BOOKS FOR PARENTS.....

- The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together While Your Marriage Comes Apart, Constance Ahrons
- The Parents’ Book About Divorce, Richard Gardner
- What Every Child Would Like His Parents to Know, Lee Salk
- Sharing Parenthood After Divorce, Ciji Ware

BOOKS FOR KIDS.....

- Mom’s House, Dad’s House, Isolina Ricci
- Dinosaur’s Divorce, Laurene Krasny

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