

WEST VIRGINIA PARENTING



APART

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Credits | 2 |
| Introduction..... | 3-5 |
| Coping with the Stress of Divorce | 6-8 |
| Steps of the Legal Process for Divorcing Parents in West Virginia | 9-12 |
| Both Parents Are Important | 13-16 |
| Helping Children through Divorce Checklist | 17 |
| Domestic Violence and Divorce | 18-19 |
| Power and Control Wheel..... | 20 |
| West Virginia Resources for Coping with Domestic Violence | 21-23 |
| What to Tell Your Children about the Divorce | 24 |
| Sources of Stress for Children | 25-26 |
| How to Tell if Your Child is Coping: Indicators of Adjustment | 27 |
| Impact of Divorce by Ages and Stages of Development..... | 28-31 |
| Are You Using your Child as a Dartboard?.....Destructive Strategies..... | 32-33 |
| Effective Communication with your Co-parent..... | 34-38 |
| Tips for Successful Parallel Parenting | 40 |
| Creating a Workable Co-Parenting Relationship..... | 41 |
| What a Co-Parenting Arrangement Includes (Parenting Plan)..... | 42 |
| Parenting Responsibility DOs and DON'Ts | 43-45 |
| New Family Relationships: Restructuring After Divorce..... | 49 |
| A Note for Never Married Parents..... | 50 |
| Resources about Divorce | 51-58 |

Credits

This parent guide is the result of collaboration among Extension Family Specialists from: Connecticut, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Dr. Maureen T. Mulroy, Family Specialist, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and Faculty Member, School of Family Studies (retired) and Dr. Denise J. Brandon, Parenting and Family Relations Specialist with the University of Tennessee Extension, generously shared their materials with Jane Riffe, Ed.D. Family and Human Relations Specialist, West Virginia University Extension. Dr. Riffe added new material and included information on West Virginia laws.

Much of the material was drawn from *Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective Co-Parenting*, first published by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System and School of Family Studies in 1995. (Mulroy, M., Malley, C. Z., Sabatelli, R. M., & Waldron, R. (1995). *Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective Co-Parenting*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut Extension Service). Since then, *Parenting Apart* has been used in whole or in part, by 32 states and counties. The curriculum was revised in 2011 (Mulroy, M. T., Krammer-Rickaby, L., Sutherland, M., Adamsons, K., Kimball Baker, L. (2011). *Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective CoParenting*. Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, Center for Applied Research.

Special appreciation goes to Meg Baughman, J.D., M.S.W., Integrated Marketing and Creative Services Leader, WVU Extension Office of Communications, for concepts and layout of the Educator's Guide, and to Greg Jacobs, Senior Graphics Designer, WVU Extension, who made it happen. Healthy Families/Healthy Children Graduate Assistant Whitney Boutelle, M.S.W., contributed many hours to research and editing.

Angela Faulkner-Van Deysen, M.P.A., Program Manager for the WVU Extension's Healthy Families/Healthy Children Initiative, provided steady support, input and attention to details for the production of this curriculum. Ron Hatfield, J.D., M.B.A., Financial Management Specialist, West Virginia University Extension, served as reviewer for the legal sections of the program. Pepper Arrowood, Program Coordinator for the West Virginia Supreme Court, provided important program information and encouraging support. Finally, Jessica Troilo, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Family Studies at West Virginia University has become a wonderful colleague and training partner. She provided help in the final editing.

Partial funding for the development of *West Virginia Parenting Apart* materials has been provided by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Children and Families, through the Healthy Families/Healthy Children Initiative (www.hfhc.wvu.edu).

Jane B. Riffe, Ed.D.
June 1, 2012

Introduction

WELCOME TO PARENTING APART!

This class is designed to help you, and your children, understand the many changes that are part of separation and divorce.

History

Parent education for divorcing parents of minor children is mandated under an amendment to the West Virginia Code Annotated, Chapter 48, Article 9, Section 104, Subsection (a). This law requires divorcing parents of minor children to attend a parent education class to complete a parenting plan and to seek mediation before going back to court, if they cannot agree on issues about their children.

This law is designed to:

- Help divorcing parents learn how to work together, when it is safe, for the best interests of their children
- Reduce the distress children experience when their parents' divorce

About the Parenting Apart Program

Parenting Apart is an educational program developed by the WVU Extension Service to assist recently separated or divorced parents in their efforts to manage and cope with the transition to the post-divorce family. The curriculum is built on similar programs used by Extension and community parent educators in other states since 1995. *Parenting Apart* has been approved by the West Virginia Supreme Court as the mandated program beginning September, 2012

In this class, you will learn:

- How divorce affects children of different ages and stages
- The impact of domestic violence on children
- How to keep your child out of conflicts between you and your co-parent
- New skills to more effectively communicate with your child and the other parent
- Why it's important to allow children to have a relationship with both parents when it is safe for all involved
- Things to keep in mind as you develop your parenting plan

Certificate of Completion

Parents who complete the two-hour course will receive a certificate. This certificate should be given to your attorney or filed with the court clerk in the county where the divorce is filed.

Do Parenting Classes Work?

- The short answer is Yes.
- We know from much research that the most damaging thing to children during and after divorce is being put in the middle of continuing conflict between their parents.
- Going back to court to punish the other parent is very hard on the children. In other states, classes similar to this one have been studied to see if it helps parents and children.
- Parents who attended classes in other states:
 - Said they were more able to keep from putting their children in the middle of their conflicts with the other parent, even when conflicts between the two parents continued.
 - Returned to court much less frequently than those who attended classes later in their divorce process.

Who can benefit from this course?

- Parents who have filed for divorce in West Virginia courts
- Parents returning to court for issues related to children and divorce
- Never married parents dealing with custody issues through the court
- Divorced parents interested in improving their co-parenting skills to benefit their kids
- Grandparents or other relatives seeking custody or wanting better ways to reduce shared parenting conflicts

Commonly Asked Questions

What if my youngest child will be 18 in a few weeks or months?

In reality, most parents will continue in the parenting role for quite some time after their children become legal adults.

The divorce of parents can be traumatic to older teens and young adults.

Adult children don't like being put in the middle of their parents' conflicts any more than younger children do.

The information on effective communications and keeping children out of your conflicts can be helpful for all age groups.

I am a grandparent or other relative seeking custody; how will this help me?

Though you will not be co-parenting with a former spouse, you will still be in a co-parenting relationship. It may be with your own child or your sibling, or another relative.

Most of the material covered in this class will apply to your situation because you will need to learn how to keep the child out of conflicts with the co-parent, no matter who that person is or how he or she is related to you.

We have been divorced for years. How will this class help us?

The fact that you are in the class means that you and your children are about to go through another change related to the divorce.

This may create some new problems in your co-parenting relationship and in your relationship with your child.

It may also present some opportunities for correcting things you may not have done as well as you would have liked in the past. You may learn some new skills in this class that will make that possible. Also, you can help other class members by sharing what you have learned through your experiences.

My child's other parent and I have never been married, so there is no divorce. Why should we attend?

If you and the child's parent have lived together with your child, the things your child will experience will be the same as if you had been married and are going through a divorce.

You may be required to develop a Parenting Plan for how you and the other parent will share parenting responsibilities in the future.

If you or the other parent has never been involved in your child's life, you have some issues that this class will not cover.

However, you may learn more effective ways to communicate with your child and the other parent, and you will learn why it is important to allow children to have a relationship with both parents when it is safe for all involved.

It is typical for people who are divorcing to experience some amount of stress. The table below can help you spot the changes in your life that might be causing you stress. Rate how high your level of stress is for each change. Knowing about stress can help treat it.

Coping with the Stress of Divorce: Self-Assessment

| Sources of Stress | Level of Stress | | | Sources of Stress | Level of Stress | | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------|------|
| Changes in: | Low | Medium | High | Changes in: | Low | Medium | High |
| <u>Household Tasks</u> | | | | <u>Family finances</u> | | | |
| <u>Relationships with family</u> | | | | <u>Relationships with friends</u> | | | |
| <u>Parenting roles</u> | | | | <u>Parenting responsibilities</u> | | | |
| <u>Spouse relationship</u> | | | | <u>Emotional Security</u> | | | |
| <u>Sexual Relationship</u> | | | | <u>Having an identity crisis</u> | | | |
| <u>Being single again</u> | | | | | | | |

This next table can help you identify yours and your child's emotional responses to the changes marked above. Children can also have emotional responses to the changes divorce brings.

| Emotional Response | Rate <u>Your</u> Response | | | Rate <u>Your Child's</u> Response | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|--------|------|-----------------------------------|--------|------|
| | Low | Medium | High | Low | Medium | High |
| <u>Shock</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Hurt</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Shame</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Anxiety</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Acceptance</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Anger</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Sadness</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Loneliness</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Guilt</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Denial</u> | | | | | | |
| <u>Overwhelmed</u> | | | | | | |

This last table can help you identify whether or not the changes you are experiencing are causing differences in behavior. Answer for both yourself and your child.

| Behavior | Have YOU felt a change in YOUR: | | Has YOUR CHILD changed his/her: | |
|-------------|---------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Eating | YES: _____ | NO: _____ | YES: _____ | NO: _____ |
| Sleeping | YES: _____ | NO: _____ | YES: _____ | NO: _____ |
| Drug Use | YES: _____ | NO: _____ | YES: _____ | NO: _____ |
| Alcohol Use | YES: _____ | NO: _____ | YES: _____ | NO: _____ |
| Yelling | YES: _____ | NO: _____ | YES: _____ | NO: _____ |

Adapted from Mulroy et.al (2011) *Parenting Apart: Strategies for Effective CoParenting*.

Coping with the Stress of Divorce: Identify Your “Stress Barometers”

Everyone develops patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that signal the presence of stress. Sometimes we are unaware of these patterns, and we may ignore the stress signals. You can deal with stress more effectively if you notice your “stress barometers.” On the list below, check the responses that **you** notice during stressful times.

Personal Stress Symptoms

Behavioral changes:

- ☐ Crying
- ☐ Withdrawal from other people
- ☐ Aggression
- ☐ Substance misuse (drugs, alcohol, tobacco, food)
- ☐ Agitation
- ☐ Exhaustion
- ☐ Restlessness
- ☐ Disrupted sleep
- ☐ Other

Emotional changes:

- ☐ Sadness
- ☐ Guilt
- ☐ Depression
- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Tension
- ☐ Irritability
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Mood Swings
- ☐ Other

Thoughts and Feelings Related to Stress

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking you cannot cope | <input type="checkbox"/> Being unable to make decisions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having a negative view of the world | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling worthless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling frightened for no known reason | <input type="checkbox"/> Having a negative view of yourself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling bored with everything | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling confused |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Worrying about everything, large or small | <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming yourself |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being unable to concentrate | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling that you are about to fall apart |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Having nightmares | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling hopeless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling helpless | <input type="checkbox"/> Having the same worrisome thought over and over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling afraid that something bad is going to happen | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |

Want to learn more?

Take the Stress Barometers Quiz at hfhc.ext.wvu.edu/r/download/1144

Chart adapted from Brandon, Denise. (2011). *Parenting Apart: Effective Co-Parenting*. Nashville, TN: University of Tennessee Extension – Family and Consumer Sciences.

Take Charge of Your Life

One way to reduce stress is to take charge of your own life instead of letting life happen to you. Here are some suggestions for ways to take charge and reduce your stress levels.

Control your schedule:

- Plan activities so that you don't have to rush from one to the next
- Set priorities and stick to them most of the time (reduce activities, if necessary)
- Take on one task at a time
- Make time for something you enjoy every day, if only for a few minutes at a time

Slow down:

- Eat, walk, and talk more slowly
- Listen until the other person is finished speaking
- Start activities in plenty of time – don't try to squeeze in one more thing
- Allow time for 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night

Make time for play:

- Go somewhere you enjoy with a friend or relative
- Play your favorite sport
- Work on your favorite hobby
- Engage in physical activity such as walking or running, gardening, yoga, karate, etc.

Understand yourself:

- Talk over personal feelings and concerns with a trusted friend or relative
- List your good points or strengths and post the list where you and others can see it
- Build close friendships with people who help you feel respected and appreciated

Control your anger:

- Learn to recognize your body's signals that you are angry
- Accept that anger is an emotion—it is neither right nor wrong
- Try to identify the feeling that is triggering your anger (fear of hurt, failure, or loss; feelings of being used, being inadequate, being replaced, or not being loved)
- Express your feelings to a trusted friend or counselor. Learn to use "I" messages to express your feelings instead of accusing, yelling, or threatening

Relax:

- Close your eyes and listen to yourself breathe - calm, steady, natural breaths
- Imagine yourself relaxing in your ideal location such as a beach or by a mountain stream.
- Consciously tense, then relax, all of your muscles, beginning with your toes and ending with your neck and head

More ideas for relaxing at

<http://www.fh.ext.wvu.edu/wellness/challenges/week-49>

Steps of the Legal Process for Divorcing Parents in West Virginia

The exact circumstances of each case may vary, depending on the situation and the judicial district in which the divorce is filed. In general, the following steps occur.

1) Petition (or Complaint for Divorce) is filed

One spouse files a complaint through his or her attorney and files a temporary parenting plan to the court. The complaint includes personal information required by law and sets out some legal grounds for divorce. The **Temporary Parenting Plan** describes how co-parents plan to share parenting, including decision-making and residential time, during the divorce procedure. If parents can agree on a parenting plan, they can prepare a **Joint Parenting Plan** and submit it to the Court. If parents cannot agree to a joint plan, either parent can submit an **Individual Proposed Parenting Plan** and ask the court to enter a temporary order on parenting based on that individual plan. If one parent wishes to contest the other parent's individual plan, the contesting parent must submit their ideas on an Individual Plan. You can find a form for a temporary parenting plan at

<http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/rules/familycourt/parenting.pdf>

2) Petition or complaint is served (delivered to the other parent)

Respondent is served with a summons and a copy of the petition. Respondent normally has 20 days to file an answer (written response filed with the circuit clerk's office) to the petition. In the event that the Respondent is out of state or is informed of the Petition for Divorce by publication, he or she has 30 days to file an answer.

Prior to the final divorce hearing, co-parents are also required to attend a 2 hour parent education class, which provides information and skills to help co-parents manage conflicts and decision in a way which lessens negative impacts on children. Your children will benefit more if you attend this class early in the divorce process to learn how to reduce and manage disagreements with your co-parent.

❖ **Discovery or disclosure phase may occur at this point.**

3) Preliminary Hearing takes place

There may be a discovery or disclosure phase with requests for certain documents and written questions. Dispositions and motions for hearing may also be filed. Within forty days filing the petition, the divorcing parties must obtain and complete a financial statement form that is available in the circuit clerk's office. This form details income, debts, and properties of the parties. This form must be filled out within forty days after the petition is served, or at the most, five days prior to the hearing. Copies of the financial statement must also be served on the other spouse.

There may be a Preliminary Hearing, which deals with issues that must be taken care of before the divorce is final. This hearing may involve childcare or child support and other issues. At this same time, parents can work on the joint parenting plan and the Marital Dissolution Agreement (MDA).

Parenting plan forms can be found on the website for the West Virginia Family Court:

www.state.wv.us/wvsca/rules/familycourt/parenting.pdf

If parents can't agree on a parenting plan, the judge may order mediation
(See section below for more information on mediation.)

At any time in the process, reconciliation of marriage or mediation can occur. If the parents do not get back together, and if no domestic violence or extenuating circumstances are involved, mediation is a good way to work out differences between parents concerning the joint parenting plan.

After the Joint Parenting plan is worked out, the last part of the divorce can occur.

There are 30 days given to appeal after the final hearing. After this hearing, there may be more court hearings involving the needs of minor children for years to come, if necessary. However, you will make a plan within the Permanent Parenting plan for actions you will take, possibly including going back to a mediator, before returning to court over issues regarding your children.

What is a Parenting Plan? How do I complete it?

The parenting plan is a plan for how parents will share their parenting responsibilities. The proposed parenting plan is probably the most important document you will file in your divorce case. The Family Court will rely on the parenting plan to allocate custodial responsibility, time spent with the children, and decide how the parents will share the responsibility for making the decisions that guide their children's lives. So, as you begin developing your parenting plan, put in the time and effort to do it right because your children's welfare depends on you doing a good job.

The form is available from your attorney or online at:

www.state.wv.us/wvsca/rules/familycourt/parenting.pdf

Instructions for completing this plan can be found at:

www.state.wv.us/wvsca/rules/familycourt/instructions.pdf

Worksheet for completing Individual Proposed Parenting Plan:

www.state.wv.us/wvsca/rules/familycourt/Worksheet.pdf

These instructions and forms are designed to assist parents in developing their Individual Parenting Plans..

- West Virginia law requires that parents submit a parenting plan to the court.
- If parents are able to agree on a plan, they can **file a Joint Proposed Parenting Plan** with the court. You can fill this out together to show how you will share parenting responsibilities for your child after the divorce.

West Virginia law favors this type of plan and encourages parents to try to make a joint plan.

- Once the plan is submitted, the Family Judge will accept it or request that modifications be made to the plan. The parents can make the changes so the court will approve the plan.
- If parents are not able to agree on the plan, a mother or father may submit an **Individual Proposed Parenting Plan**. The same form is used for Individual and Joint Parenting Plans.
- Each parent should create a plan and then present that plan in the court and explain why it is in the child's best interest.
- If parents are submitting individual plans, the court may order them to pre-mediation screening. This is a process where the mother and father are interviewed to see if they could be helped in mediation. If mediation could help, the parents are required to go to mediation to try to create a joint plan.
- Parents who are filing Individual Parenting Plans must also attach a worksheet form. See link to the worksheet on the preceding page.

***Helpful resource: In this guide, if you turn to page 39, “What a Co-Parenting Arrangement Includes,” you will find a list of questions for co-parents.**

You can use the list to help you create your Joint Proposed Parenting Plan.

4) Divorce and Mediation

In West Virginia, the law requires parents to try different ways of solving conflicts other than going to court. You should try to work together in making decisions, if it is safe and possible to do so. If you and your spouse cannot decide alone, you can select a mediator whom both of you trusts to help you resolve conflicts and make decisions. Parents must pay for mediation at an hourly rate based on their combined annual income. Many mediators volunteer their time to mediate cases for indigent parents.

As parents, you will have the most control over decisions affecting your child(ren) if you work out the parenting plan together, either alone or with a mediator. You have the least control when the courts make the decisions for you. In most cases, it is best for you and your children if you and your co-parent work together to make decisions concerning them.

If parents cannot work together, they can sometimes meet individually with the mediator so they do not have to see each other or talk to each other face-to-face. This may be a good option for parents who have had violence in their marriage or who cannot control their anger toward each other. If parents cannot agree on a parenting plan, the judge will decide how conflicts will be resolved.

Mediation:

- Encourages direct communication between the parents
- Helps parents decide for themselves what is best for their child(ren)

- Helps parents find new ways to solve problems
- Promotes cooperation
- Provides an informal setting that may save time and lower the cost of a divorce
- Preserves the strengths of an ongoing relationship as parents
- Is confidential and private

The mediator:

- Will remain impartial throughout the process
- Will not give legal advice
- Is not a judge
- Will not decide the dispute
- Will provide each party with a full opportunity to effectively express his or her interests

More information is available at: <http://www.state.wv.us/wvsca/familyct/cover.htm>

Some parents are not required to attend mediation. For example, mediation may not be required in cases where there is a history of domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, substance abuse, or mental illness.

Both Parents Are Important

When it is safe for the children, it is important that they maintain a relationship with both parents. Divorce often means that children will have less time with both parents, but fathers are often the ones they see less for a variety of reasons:

- Courts are more likely to designate the mother as the primary residential parent.
- Mothers may not encourage children to remain engaged with their fathers.
- Parents may move a long distance apart.
- Fathers may withdraw from the relationship because it is too painful or they think that will be best for the children.

Fathers play an important role in their children's well-being and development.

The National Fatherhood Initiative website at www.fatherhood.org/ discusses research findings that point to the importance of keeping fathers involved in their children's lives.

- Children who had highly involved fathers were less likely to experiment with drugs than those whose fathers had little or no involvement.
- Children whose nonresident fathers provided child support had higher academic achievement and fewer behavior problems at school. These effects were greatest when agreements were reached cooperatively or voluntarily, not through court order.
- Children who were emotionally close to their fathers had fewer friends who smoked, drank alcohol, or used marijuana and were less likely to use those substances themselves.
- Children whose fathers were involved in their schools were more likely to receive grades of "A" than those with uninvolved fathers.
- Girls whose parents separated when the girls were between birth and six years of age were twice as likely to begin their periods at an early age and 2.5 times as likely to have an early pregnancy as girls who lived with both biological parents. These risks increased with three or more changes in their family environment.

The Latest Research on Children and Divorce

Researchers have found that:

- 75 - 80% of children whose parents divorce go on to have successful adult lives and relationships.

- Children whose parents divorce are 2 to 2.5 times more likely than children from non-divorced parents to have lifelong emotional or behavior problems (20 to 25 percent compared to 10 percent). Some of these problems include difficulty forming close personal relationships in adulthood and a higher rate of divorce in their own marriages.
- Father love and mother love are equally important. When one parent withdraws their love, that child is more likely to have emotional problems, low self-esteem, depression, aggressive behavior, or to withdraw from their friends.

Why do some children from divorcing families adjust well while others have life-long problems?

Researchers found these important differences:

- How much conflict the parents had before divorce
 - In families where parents had high levels of conflict, children whose parents divorced were better off than those whose parents remained married.
 - However, in low-conflict families, children whose parents divorced had more problems than children whose parents stayed together. These included problems of lower overall mental well-being, less support from friends and problems with close personal relationships.
 - Teens: It is important to remember that divorce cannot be blamed for all of the teens' problems. Researchers found that problems exhibited by teens after their parents divorced were present at least one year before the divorce. Some of the poor outcomes for children of divorce may be related to things that happened in the family before divorce.

****Protective Factors: What helps children do well?**

Children who have adjusted successfully to their parents' divorce usually have these protective factors:

1. They live with a parent who is mentally competent and functioning adequately,
2. They have frequent contact with an involved non-custodial parent, and
3. Their parents have decreased their level of conflict or avoided exposing their children to their conflicts.

Source: Kelly, J. B., & Emery, R. D. (2003). Children's adjustment following divorce: Risk and resilience perspectives. *Family Relations*, 52, pp. 352-362.

What about parenting schedules?

There is no single arrangement that will work well for all children and their families. However, there seems to be agreement that, when it is safe, it is best to allow children to have ample access to both parents. A fifty-fifty time split is almost impossible to

manage and may not be best for all children. One study found that children whose parents had joint legal custody (both parents jointly made decisions about the child and the child lived primarily with one parent but had ample parenting time with the other parent) had similar outcomes to children in shared parenting arrangements. Even if time is not equal between parents, children can still have positive outcomes. But, when researchers have asked children what they wanted, children said they wanted more equal time with both parents.

What works for any one family will depend on factors such as parent-child relationship, closeness of parents' residences, parents' work schedules, children's schedules, and how cooperative and flexible parents can be with each other. Children who were placed with a parent of the same sex did not fare any better than those who were placed with an opposite-sex parent. However, boys desired more time with their fathers than did girls. Both boys and girls saw their mothers as being less supportive of time with fathers than they would have liked.

How can divorcing parents help their children?

Even though some of these research findings are troubling, it is important to remember that the majority of children of divorce will become well-adjusted adults. Based on evidence from research, what can divorcing parents do to help their children adapt to this major event in their lives?

1. **Reduce conflict**– If parents are able to avoid conflict after divorce, children from high-conflict marriages can actually benefit from their parents' divorce. If conflict between parents continues, children's well-being may not be improved by divorce.
2. **Use parallel parenting if needed**– In cases of continued conflict or potential violence, it is better to try the parallel parenting approach (page 40) where the parents avoid direct contact with each other and do not attempt to interfere with or change the other parent's rules when the children are there.
3. **Stay involved**– It is important for both parents to be involved in their children's lives, if it is safe for all concerned (no child abuse or family violence involved). Both parents should support and encourage time spent with the other parent. This does not mean that parents have to interact face-to-face. They must be willing to do what they can to help their children keep close ties with each parent.
4. **Be a parent, not a pal**– Both parents need to remain in their roles as parents. Those who make their children their best friends put their children in a position of becoming an adult before they are ready. Parents should not share their adult problems with their children. This puts a heavy burden on a child. Instead, parents should find other adults with whom to talk about their problems when needed.
5. **Be consistent**– Parents should try to keep rules and routines as consistent as possible between homes. Parents can work out the rules they want their children

to live by, regardless of which home they are in. This can help both parents feel good that their children are getting consistent training. Children will be less likely to be confused and less able to play one parent against the other.

6. **Minimize changes**– As much as possible, parents should try to keep changes for their children to a minimum. Children may experience changes in residence, school, church, extracurricular activities, or access to other relatives. The more changes associated with the divorce, the more stressful it will be for the children.
7. **Pay child support**– Consistent payment of child support is associated with better child outcomes and with greater involvement of the secondary residential parent. However, a parent should not restrict a child from time with the other parent because child-support payments have not been received. Likewise, a parent should not withhold child support payments because time with the child has been withheld (in fact, both are illegal).
8. **Be flexible**– Children need some flexibility in the parenting schedule as they mature and their needs and schedules change. Younger children adjust better to short, frequent turns with each parent. As children get older, their own commitments and activities may interfere with parenting schedules. Working with children's activities and plans can help children feel like their needs are being considered.

To summarize, the key for children's positive adjustment to divorce is found in how the parent adjust to the divorce.

Children usually adjust well when:

- Parents are able to keep their children out of the middle of parent conflicts.
- Parents remain in the parenting role.
- Both parents stay involved (unless it is unsafe).

Helping Children through Divorce: A Checklist

Below are actions you can take to help your children. Check off the ones that you have done already, and circle the ones that you plan to do.

Reassurance

- ☐ Assure our child that the divorce was not his/her fault.
- ☐ Reassure our child that he/she is loved by both parents.
- ☐ Tell our child that it's OK to feel sad because the other parent is leaving or absent.

Support

- ☐ Support our child's need to spend time with the other parent
- ☐ Support our child's desire to love both parents. Tell our child that it's still OK to love both of us, even though we are no longer going to be married to each other.

Encouragement

- ☐ Encourage our child to play with friends and do other age appropriate activities.
- ☐ Encourage our child to pursue the same interests he/she had before learning of the divorce or separation.

Fairness

- ☐ Not make our child choose between parents by asking which parent she/he loves more.
- ☐ Be fair with the other parent in sharing time with our child.

Trust

- ☐ Show our child that I trust his/her ability to adapt to these changes.

Honesty

- ☐ Acknowledge that our child may wish to have me and my former spouse get back together, but do not encourage or support this wish.
- ☐ Talk with our child honestly about changes or moves that will affect him/her before they occur.

Stability

- ☐ Maintain the individual relationship that I have with our child and encourage the other parent to do the same.
- ☐ Stick to a daily routine with our child.
- ☐ Make changes in our child's life as slowly as possible, giving our child opportunities to discuss these changes with me and rewarding our child for good efforts in making these changes.

Security

- ☐ Not to use our child as my counselor or source of emotional support because my neediness may make our child feel insecure. Instead, I will try to find an adult who can fulfill those needs for me.

Open Circle of Support

- ☐ Promote relationships between our child and other safe, healthy, caring adults, including extended family, friends, and professionals

Domestic Violence and Divorce

Domestic violence is one of the reasons why some couples divorce. Parents may feel guilty about leaving an abusive partner because they are afraid the divorce will hurt their children.

However, researchers report that:

- Children whose parents have high levels of conflict in their marriages are better off if their parents' divorce than if the parents remain married. When children are taken out of the violent situation they often improve in behavior and school work and in their feelings of security and self-esteem.
- Witnessing abuse and **domestic violence is harmful to children even when they are not being abused themselves.** When children see violence between their parents or a parent and a step-parent or partner, they may grow up confused about the meaning of love, violence, and intimacy.

Impact of domestic violence on victims

The process of separation and divorce can be a time of great turmoil. Because of that, the risk of domestic violence may be greatest during the weeks just after separation or filing for divorce. It is important for divorcing persons to be aware of the increased risk and to take steps to reduce that risk. The Power and Control wheel on page 19 shows that abuse revolves around maintaining control over the victim. It is important to seek legal and emotional support as it is unlikely to get better over time.

As a victim of domestic violence you have the following rights:

- You may file a criminal complaint with the District Attorney (D.A.)
- You may request a protective order which may include the following:
 - An order preventing the abuser from committing further abuse
 - An order requiring the abuser to leave your household
 - An order preventing the abuser from harassing you or contacting you for any reason
 - An order giving you or the other parent custody of or visitation with your minor children
 - An order requiring the abuser to pay money to support you and the minor children if the abuser has a legal obligation to do so
 - An order preventing the abuser from stalking you
- If you are ordered to go to mediation:
 - As the victim, you must agree to the mediation, and you can request the process to stop any time you feel unsafe.
 - The mediation will be provided by a mediator specially trained in domestic violence to help protect your safety.

- If you choose mediation, you may have an advocate or supporting person of your choice present during the sessions. This advocate can be your attorney or an advocate from a domestic violence service agency. Advocates from these agencies will provide this service free of charge to you.

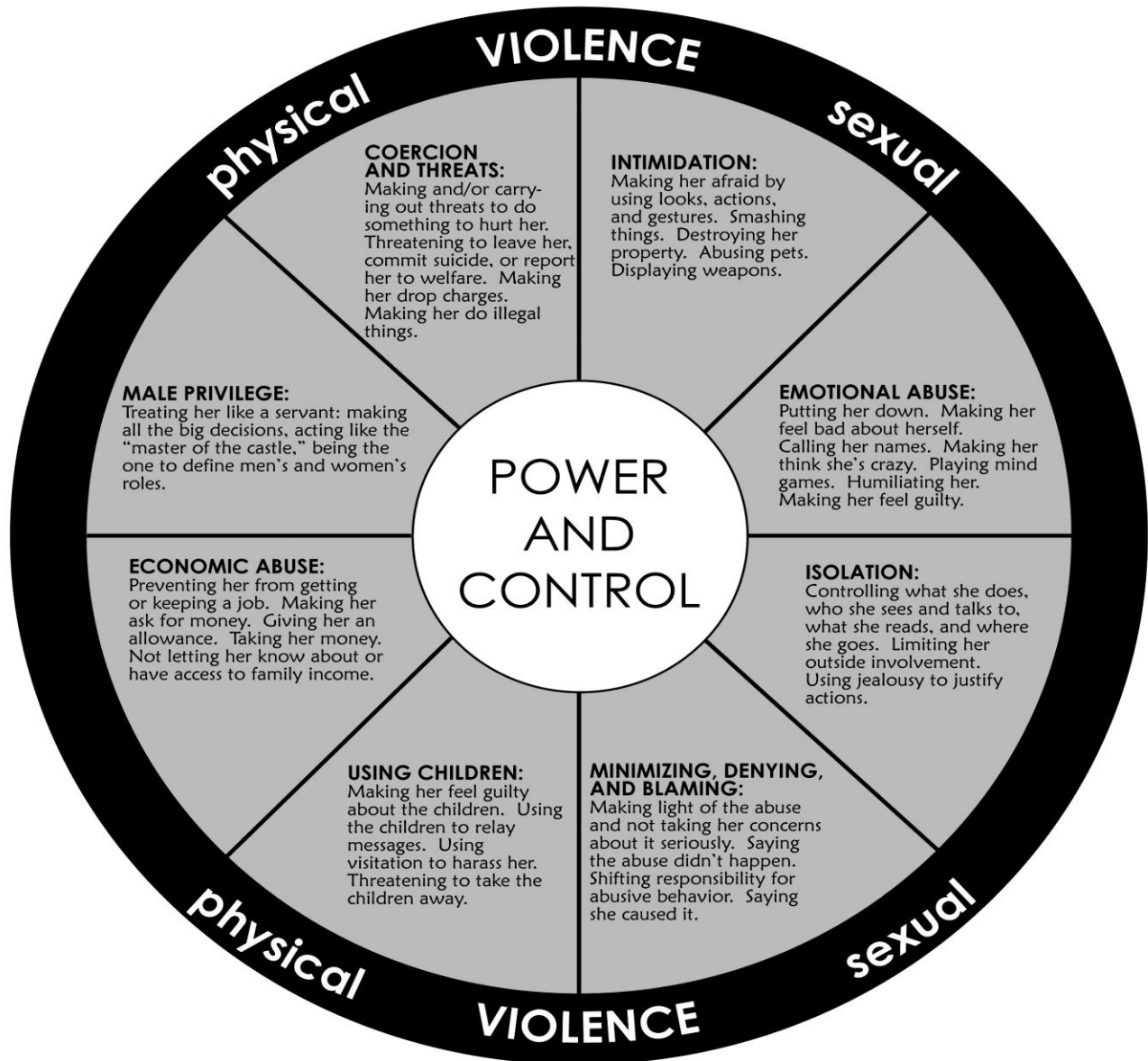
The Power and Control Wheel on the next page is a helpful tool to understand how abusive behaviors are used by a batterer to maintain control over his partner. Ask your instructor or call the confidential contact number listed for your county on pages 22-23 if you want more information.

West Virginia resources for domestic violence are outlined on page 21.

POWER AND CONTROL WHEEL

Physical and sexual assaults, or threats to commit them, are the most apparent forms of domestic violence and are usually the actions that allow others to become aware of the problem. However, regular use of other abusive behaviors by the batterer, when reinforced by one or more acts of physical violence, make up a larger system of abuse. Although physical assaults may occur only once or occasionally, they instill threat of future violent attacks and allow the abuser to take control of the woman's life and circumstances.

The Power & Control diagram is a particularly helpful tool in understanding the overall pattern of abusive and violent behaviors, which are used by a batterer to establish and maintain control over his partner. Very often, one or more violent incidents are accompanied by an array of these other types of abuse. They are less easily identified, yet firmly establish a pattern of intimidation and control in the relationship.



Developed by:
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project
202 East Superior Street
Duluth, MN 55802
218.722.4134

Produced and distributed by:



NATIONAL CENTER
on Domestic and Sexual Violence
training • consulting • advocacy

7800 Shoal Creek, Ste 120-N • Austin, Texas 78757
tel: 512.407.9020 • fax: 512.407.9022 • www.ncdsv.org

West Virginia Resources for Coping with Domestic Violence

- **Prepare to leave**

A victim of domestic abuse may attempt to leave several times before he or she is successful. You can maximize your chance of successfully leaving an abusive situation with careful preplanning.

Flight Bag: This bag is ideally at the home of a trusted friend or relative. Make sure you can access it but the batterer cannot. Contents of the bag should include: Medication, important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, photo id, extra car keys, phone numbers, spare clothes for you and the children, toiletries, special photos, cash, disposable cell phone such as a trampoline, comfort items for yourself and your children.

Personalized Safety Plan: This is a plan that you draw up, a contract of good faith for yourself that tells how you plan on keeping yourself and your children safe if an abusive relationship reaches a crisis. **This safety plan is only as good as your ability to follow it and to keep it away from the abuser. Keep this document in a secure location!** Blank safety plans are available at:

<http://doa.alaska.gov/vccb/pdf/safety.pdf> and
<http://www.familyrefugecenter.com/safeplan.html>

- **Call 911 – Document Abuse**

Call 911 if you are in danger now. The police can assist you in getting to a safe place and to get a protective order in place. If the abuse is recent and there are physical signs of abuse, be sure to have the abuse documented by the police, your doctor or the emergency room. You can also keep a journal to document the abuse but be sure that it is secure. Write down incidents of physical, emotional or sexual abuse in as much detail as possible and keep it somewhere that your partner can't get it, such as your desk at work.

- **Helplines (24 Hour)**

| | |
|--|--------------|
| National Domestic Violence Hotline | 800-799-7233 |
| Rape, Assault, & Incest National Network | 800-656-4673 |

Additional Resources

Legal Help

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| Legal Aid of WV | 866-255-4370, |
| WV State Bar (Lawyer Referral Service) | 866-989-8227, 304-558-2456 |

Information and resources

WV Coalition Against Domestic Violence

| | |
|--|--------------|
| www.wvcadv.org | 304-963-3552 |
|--|--------------|

WV Foundation for Rape Information and Services

| | |
|--|--------------|
| www.FRIS.org | 304-366-9500 |
|--|--------------|

Rape, Assault, & Incest National Network

| | |
|--|--------------|
| www.rainn.org | 800-656-4673 |
|--|--------------|

HELP FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN YOUR COUNTY

| County | Agency | Address | Phone |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Barbour | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 457-5020 |
| Berkeley | Shenandoah Women's Center | 236 W. Martin St. Martinsburg, WV 25401 | (304) 263-8292 |
| Boone | YWCA Resolve | 1114 Quarrier St. Charleston, WV 25301 | (304) 369-4189 |
| Braxton | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 765-2848 |
| Brooke | Lighthouse DV Awareness Center | PO Box 275 Weirton, WV 26062 | (304) 797-7233 |
| Cabell | Branches, Inc. | PO Box 403 Huntington, WV 25708 | (304) 529-2382 |
| Calhoun | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 354-9254 |
| Clay | YWCA Resolve | 1114 Quarrier St. Charleston, WV 25301 | (304) 587-7243 |
| Doddridge | HOPE, Inc. | PO Box 626 Fairmont, WV 26555 | (304) 367-1100 |
| Fayette | Women's Resource Center | PO Box 1476 Beckley, WV 25802 | (304) 574-0500 |
| Gilmer | HOPE, Inc. | PO Box 626 Fairmont, WV 26555 | (304) 462-5352 |
| Grant | Family Crisis Center | PO Box 207 Keyser, WV 26726 | (304) 257-4606 |
| Greenbrier | Family Refuge Center | PO Box 249 Lewisburg, WV 24901 | (304) 645-6334 |
| Hampshire | Family Crisis Center | PO Box 207 Keyser, WV 26726 | (304) 788-6061 |
| Hancock | Lighthouse DV Awareness Center | PO Box 275 Weirton, WV 26062 | (304) 797-7233 |
| Hardy | Family Crisis Center | PO Box 207 Keyser, WV 26726 | (304) 257-4606 |
| Harrison | HOPE, Inc. | PO Box 626 Fairmont, WV 26555 | (304) 624-9835 |
| Jackson | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 372-7515 |
| Jefferson | Shenandoah Women's Center | 236 W. Martin St. Martinsburg, WV 25401 | (304) 725-7080 |
| Kanawha | YWCA Resolve | 1114 Quarrier St. Charleston, WV 25301 | (304) 340-3549 |
| Lewis | HOPE, Inc. | PO Box 626 Fairmont, WV 26555 | (304) 269-8233 |
| Lincoln | Branches, Inc. | PO Box 403 Huntington, WV 25708 | (304) 824-2600 |
| Logan | Tug Valley Recovery Shelter | PO Box 677 Williamson, WV 25661 | (304) 752-7174 |
| Marion | HOPE, Inc. | PO Box 626 Fairmont, WV 26555 | (304) 367-1100 |
| Marshall | YWCA Family Violence Prevention | 1100 Chapline St. Wheeling, WV 26003 | (304) 845-9150 |
| Mason | Branches, Inc. | PO Box 403 Huntington, WV 25708 | (304) 675-4968 |
| Mercer | Stop Abusive Family Environments | PO Box 669 Welch, WV 24801 | (304) 324-7820 |

| | | | |
|------------|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Mineral | Family Crisis Center | PO Box 207 Keyser, WV 26726 | (304) 788-6061 |
| Mingo | Tug Valley Recovery Shelter | PO Box 677 Williamson, WV 25661 | (304) 235-6121 |
| Monongalia | Rape and DV Info Center | PO Box 4228 Morgantown, WV 26505 | (304) 292-5100 |
| Monroe | Family Refuge Center | PO Box 249 Lewisburg, WV 24901 | (304) 772-5005 |
| Morgan | Shenandoah Women's Center | 236 W. Martin St. Martinsburg, WV 25401 | (304) 258-1078 |
| McDowell | Stop Abusive Family Environments | PO Box 669 Welch, WV 24801 | (304) 436-8117 |
| Nicholas | Women's Resource Center | PO Box 1476 Beckley, WV 25802 | (304) 872-7875 |
| Ohio | YWCA Family Violence Prevention | 1100 Chapline St. Wheeling, WV 26003 | (304) 232-2748 |
| Pendleton | Family Crisis Center | PO Box 207 Keyser, WV 26726 | (304) 257-4606 |
| Pleasants | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 684-3961 |
| Pocahontas | Family Refuge Center | PO Box 249 Lewisburg, WV 24901 | (304) 799-4400 |
| Preston | Rape and DV Info Center | PO Box 4228 Morgantown, WV 26505 | (304) 329-1687 |
| Putnam | Branches, Inc. | PO Box 403 Huntington, WV 25708 | (304) 586-3865 |
| Raleigh | Women's Resource Center | PO Box 1476 Beckley, WV 25802 | (304) 255-4066 or 255-2559 |
| Randolph | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 636-8433 |
| Ritchie | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 643-2407 |
| Roane | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 927-3707 |
| Summers | Women's Resource Center | PO Box 1476 Beckley, WV 25802 | (304) 466-4659 |
| Taylor | Rape and DV Info Center | PO Box 4228 Morgantown, WV 26505 | (304) 265-6534 |
| Tucker | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 478-4552 |
| Tyler | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 758-2860 |
| Upshur | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 473-0106 |
| Wayne | Branches, Inc. | PO Box 403 Huntington, WV 25708 | (304) 272-9035 |
| Webster | Women's Aid in Crisis | PO Box 2062 Elkins, WV 26241 | (304) 847-2211 |
| Wetzel | YWCA Family Violence Prevention | 1100 Chapline St. Wheeling, WV 26003 | (304) 455-6400 |
| Wirt | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 428-2333 |
| Wood | Family Crisis Intervention Center | PO Box 695 Parkersburg, WV 26102 | (304) 428-2333 |
| Wyoming | Stop Abusive Family Environments | PO Box 669 Welch, WV 24801 | (304) 732-8176 |

*This information and more is available by visiting www.wvcadv.org and the other listed websites.

What to Tell Your Children about the Divorce

Develop good boundaries with what you say and how you say it!

- Among the first questions that parents have to answer in a separation or divorce are how, when, and what to tell the children.
- Telling the child may be very painful, and parents may be tempted to put off this task for as long as possible.
- It is usually better for the child to know as soon as the parents have made their decision and before one of the parents moves out of the house.
- The way in which this information is presented can set the tone for how the children will respond to the news.
- If possible, the two parents together should tell all the children at the same time about the divorce.

What children need to know

- The child has not caused the divorce.
- Neither parent is rejecting the child.
- The child will still have a family although the parents will no longer be married to each other.
- Although the parents' feelings toward each other have changed, the parents' love for the child will go on forever.
- The parents will continue to take care of the child and provide for him/her.
- The parents should try to agree on a reasonable explanation to give the child on why they are getting a divorce. The child needs just enough information to explain the divorce. Too many details may be confusing.
- As soon as matters are settled, the child needs to know what things will stay the same and what things will change:
 - Which parent the child will live with
 - When he/she will see the other parent
 - Where the child will go to school
 - When the child will see other family members (such as grandparents)

What children do not need to know

The child does not need to be told anything that will affect his/her relationship with that parent unless the other parent is a real threat to safety.

Parents need to be truthful but need not bring up issues that have to do only with the two adults.

These include:

- ✓ Money Kids don't want to hear about details of child support.
- ✓ Sexual matters It is damaging to involve children in discussion of parents dating again or extramarital affairs.

Sources of Stress for Children

Parents need to know that all children will become anxious or worried about what this situation means for them, although how individual children will respond may vary. Children are experiencing many of the same stressors as the parents, plus the fact that they are not in control of the many changes which divorce brings.

- There are three primary sources of stress for children in a separation or divorce.
- Each of these sources significantly challenges the abilities of children to cope with the situation and each increases the distress and anxiety that children feel.
- These issues take time to manage.

1. The family they know will never be the same
“Where is my family?”

- One of the biggest fears for children is change.
- With divorce, changes will occur in many household responsibilities. Children may have to adjust to new schedules, homework, mealtimes, and bedtime routines.
- They may no longer have contact with some friends and extended family members (such as grandparents or cousins).

2. Losses associated with separation and divorce
“I am losing a lot of things in this divorce (which, by the way, I did not choose).”

- Children need love, security, closeness, and belonging, and these needs are met primarily through their relationships with parents. A secure parent-child relationship is at the foundation of children’s emotional and psychological development.
- The disruption of the marriage inevitably disrupts the parent-child relationship to some degree. Changes in the parent-child relationship and the possible loss of regular contact with one parent are usually a source of significant stress and emotional turmoil for children.
- Children also form attachments to siblings, friends, and pets. Changes in how much contact occurs with any of these relationships can cause distress for children.
- Other losses that occur as a result of separation and divorce can also undermine the child’s sense of security and well-being. Having a different bedroom and losing contact with familiar belongings can also cause distress. You might hear something like “But where will I keep my Xbox/ dolls?”

3. Fear of Abandonment
“Who will take care of me? What will happen to me?”

- Children worry about what will happen to them after the divorce. In some ways, this worry reflects children’s fears of being abandoned. Children need to know that their parents will be there for them, will remain within reach, and will continue to care for and support them.

- If one parent has already left the house because of the divorce, children might worry about the other parent leaving too.

To think about: can you think of examples where your child has been showing you his or her fear?

These are some which you might have seen:

- No one will take me to practice.
- No one will pick me up from school.
- No one will take care of me.
- I will never see my daddy/grandmother/dog/cat again

****Children are often focused on issues that can seem trivial or unimportant to parents. Extra understanding and patience with your child are required, just at the time when you are likely to be stressed yourself. Experts refer to this as the “Depleted Parent Syndrome.”**

How to Tell if Your Child Is Coping Well: Indicators of Adjustment

Children who are adjusting well to the divorce are usually:

- Doing satisfactory work in school.
- Being reasonably active in social and recreational activities (sports, drama, clubs, and like).
- Getting along with other children.

In contrast, children who are having problems adapting to the divorce are usually:

- Acting aggressively.
 - Refusing to listen to adults (parents, teachers, others).
 - Otherwise misbehaving.
 - Becoming withdrawn and depressed.
-

How Can Divorce Affect Your Child?

Children's reactions are based on their ability to understand what's happening with the divorce. This is very different for children of different ages.

- Children will respond differently based on their personalities and their ability to manage change.
 - Children's behavior is often their way of showing you that they are afraid.
 - Children under stress might fight with their siblings more often, cry more easily, have problems concentrating at school, misbehave or behave in more defiant ways, or withdraw from social contact.
-

Ages and Stages

The charts on the next few pages will help you understand what reactions you might expect from your child. Be sure to look at the tips for parents of children of different ages in the column labeled "What Parents Can Do."

Impact of Divorce by Ages and Stages of Development:

Infants (0 - 12 months)

| What they understand | How they react | What parents can do |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Do not understand anything about divorce or separation, but do notice changes in how parents respond to them | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Changes in eating or sleeping patternsMay have bowel problems (diarrhea or constipation) or may spit up more oftenMay seem more fretful, fearful or anxious | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Try to keep to normal routinesTry to remain calm in front of the babyTry to rest or relax when the baby is sleepingCall on family or friends for helpRemember that infants need regular and frequent contact with both parents |

Toddlers (13 – 30 months)

| What they understand | How they react | What parents can do |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand that one parent no longer lives in the home, although they do not understand why | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increased crying and clingingSleep problems, changes in toilet habitsReturn to earlier, baby-like behaviors, such as demanding to be fed by parents instead of feeding themselvesOften feel angry or frustrated about what has happened, but cannot understand or explain their feelingsMay show anger through temper tantrums, hitting, being upset easily, acting reckless or pouting and withdrawingMay start to worry about being away from parents at any time, and may become afraid any time the parent is out of sight, even briefly | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Comfort and reassure the childStick with regular routinesGo along with the child's need to be babied for a while, but set clear limits for what is allowed and what will happen if the child does not obey youPlan extra time to get things done so that you will not be stressed or have to hurry the childTry to spend some special time alone with the childIf the other parent cannot be with the child, give the child some time with another adult (a grandparent, aunt or uncle or family friend) who is the same sex as the parent who has left. |

**Impact of Divorce by Ages and Stages of Development:
Preschoolers & Kindergarteners (31 months – 5 years)**

| What children understand | How children react | What parents can do |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still don't understand what divorce or separation means, but do understand that parents are angry or upset and aren't living together any more. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel a sense of loss and sorrow • Are likely to have fantasies, both pleasant ("Daddy will come back") and scary ("Monsters chased me") • Wonder what will happen to them and fear they will never see the non-residential parent • May blame themselves for the separation or divorce, thinking, if they had behaved better, their parents would have stayed together • May think that what happened was their fault—they may have wished that a parent would go away when they were angry with that parent. Now that the parent is gone, the child may believe that the wish is what made the parent leave • Often become very angry. They may attack the parent they blame, or they may become depressed or withdrawn | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to talk about any questions or concerns about the divorce or separation • Encourage children to share their feelings, including their anger, through talking, some form of art, or through being active • Spend some time each day just talking to show children that parents understand and love them • Often tell children that they are not to blame for the divorce • Provide ample time with the other parent, when it is safe |

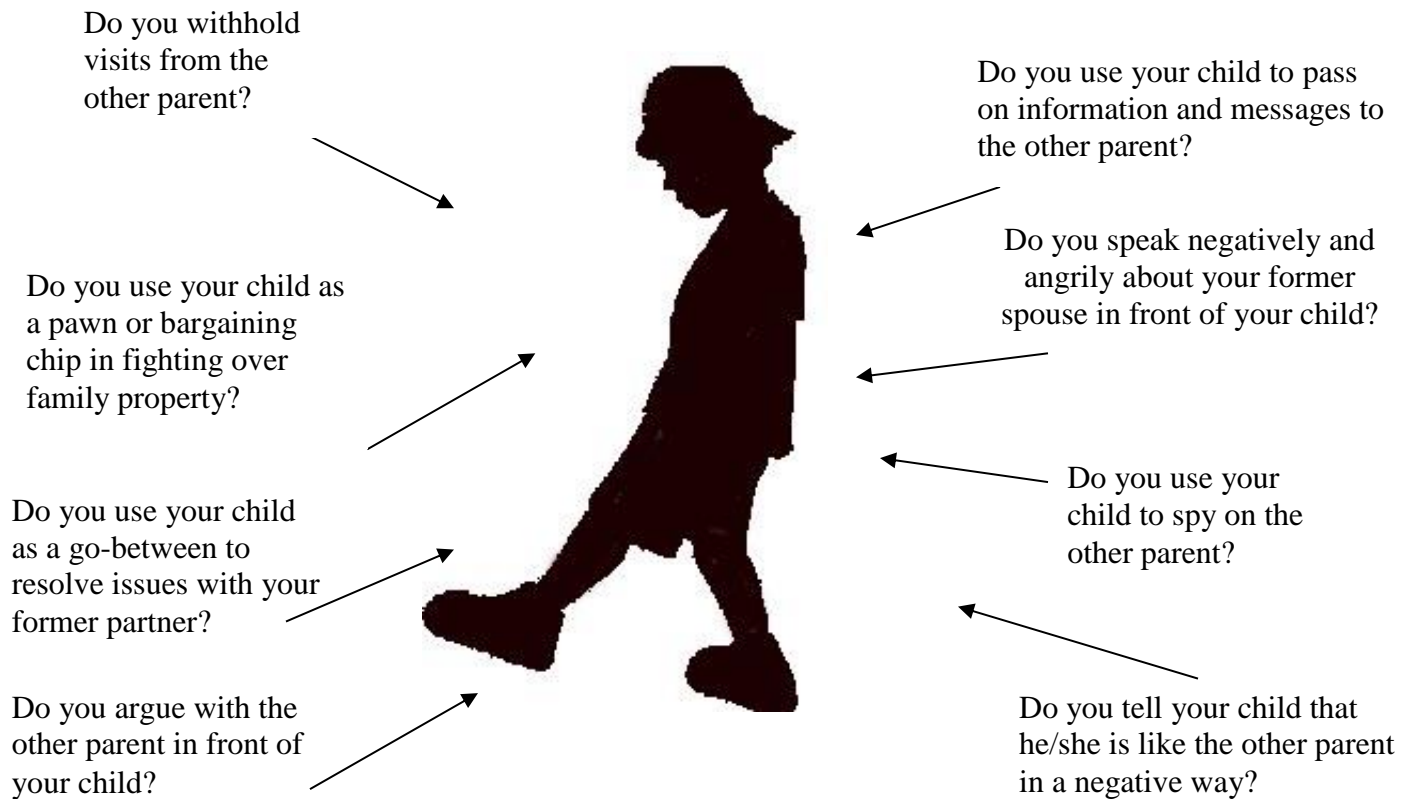
**Impact of Divorce by Ages and Stages of Development:
Elementary Age (6 – 11 years)**

| What they understand | How they react | What parents can do |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Begin to understand what divorce means</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe that their parents don't love each other anymore and know that they won't be living together any more | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feel betrayed • Feel keen sense of loss for the parent who is not living with them • Usually hope strongly that their parents will get back together • Sometimes feel rejected by the absent parent • May become very depressed, showing changes in eating and sleeping habits, losing interest in life, not being able to concentrate, crying, being upset easily, or becoming withdrawn and feeling hopeless • May fear being left by their parents, but also may worry about the future and their parents' well-being, as well as their own • May become fearful of going to school, or not being picked up on time by the nonresidential parent • May have trouble going to sleep and may become sick • May become very angry with both parents over the divorce • May start acting out or may develop signs of illness such as stomach problems, headaches or other types of symptoms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage children to talk about the divorce with both parents, with relatives, or with trusted friends of the family • Watch out for signs of depression, fears, and problem behaviors, and seek help from a counselor, such as a school guidance counselor, if you think it is needed • Parents should talk to other adults, not their children, about adult problems such as money troubles, feelings toward the other parent, problems at work, new relationships, etc. • Usually, you should tell the child's teacher about the divorce so that the teacher can provide support and watch for signs that the child needs professional help |

**Impact of Divorce by Ages and Stages of Development:
Preteens & Adolescents (12 – 17 years)**

| What they understand | How they react | What parents can do |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand, but usually do not accept divorce or separation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often become very angry May feel cheated, betrayed or rejected by one or both parents and may lose trust in their parents or in relationships in general May lose self-esteem and may worry about being loved and loveable Have strong ideas about right and wrong and may judge parents' decision to divorce harshly May be very embarrassed or upset by any change in parents' sexual behavior May become a greater risk taker and may rebel more than normal (shop-lifting, skipping school, using drugs, being sexually active, etc.) May become depressed or withdrawn or may threaten suicide May behave much better than normal, thinking that if their own behavior improves, they can save the marriage They may become more dependent because they are afraid to leave their parents, or they may take sides with one parent against the other | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give children the chance to discuss and understand their feelings and how to handle them in healthy ways; if children won't talk with you or the other parent, encourage them to share with another trusted adult (relative, family friend, teacher, guidance counselor, minister, or other professional) Keep to regular routines as much as possible Continue to keep track of children's activities: where they are, what they are doing and who they are with Remind them that, although the family is changing, children should show respect for both parents, follow house rules, do their best in school, etc. Parents should be respectful to each other as an example Resist the urge to use children as replacements for the missing partner; parents should find adult sources of support and have an adult social life. They should not depend on their children to fill empty places left by the divorce or separation |

ARE YOU USING YOUR CHILD AS A DARTBOARD?



This illustrates how parents may sometimes hurt their children by attacking each other. Your children feel the criticisms of the other parent as if they were criticisms of them. Each dart thrown at the other parent hits the child first.

Circle any behaviors that you and your former spouse are doing. You may not be able to change your former partner's behavior, but you can change your own behavior. See whether you can come up with a plan to remove at least two darts that you may now be throwing at your child. We'll share these plans as a group.

Destructive Strategies

The following is a list of specific remarks that you should not make to your child. If you find yourself saying words like these, stop and think about their impact on your child.

The **words in bold** are particularly damaging to a child's sense of security and self-esteem.

- "If you don't behave, I'll **send you to live** with your father/mother."
- "You're lazy/stubborn/bad tempered, **just like your** mother/father."
- "I could get along **better here by myself.**"
- "**If you weren't here**, I could . . ."
- "Sometimes I wish I'd been the **one to skip out.**"
- "Your mother/father **put you up to** saying that."
- "Your dad/mom **doesn't love any of us** or he/she wouldn't have left us."
- "You **can't trust** her/him."
- "That bas----/bi---!"
- "He/she was just **no good.**"
- "If she/he loved you, she/he would send your **support checks on time.**"
- "If your mother/father is five minutes **late again**, you're just not going with her/him."
- "If you **don't like what I buy you**, ask your father/mother to do better."
- "Who would you **really rather be with**, Mommy or Daddy?"
- "Now that you're the **little man/little woman** of the house . . ."
- "Someday **you'll leave me too**, just like your father/mother. Promise me that you'll never leave."
- "You're **all I have**. You're the only person I can rely on."
- "Over my dead body!"

All of these remarks raise fear and anxiety in children.

Effective Communication Strategies

No matter how angry you and your former spouse may be with each other over divorce-related matters, it will be important for you to continue to communicate for the sake of your child. You will have to have conversations with each other in order to make good decisions concerning the child, and you both want to feel that your views as parents are being heard by the other partner. There are some positive techniques that will help you keep these conversations constructive and productive.

Talking with your child's other parent

Preparation

- Before the conversation, remind yourself that your goal is to achieve what is in the best interest of your child, not to seek revenge on your former spouse for injuries done to you.
- Plan a clear description of what you feel the issue is and what you feel the best solution is for your child.
- Consider other options, especially those that you can predict your former spouse might feel are in the child's best interests.
- Consider what points might be negotiable and what points are not negotiable.
- Again: make sure, for your own sake and the child's that you are considering your child's best interests rather than your own.

The conversation

- Use neutral, factual language as much as possible.
- Use "I Messages" to make statements that explain your feelings (I feel...) rather than statements that accuse the other parent of wrongdoing (You always...). See pages 36 to 38 for "How to" tips.
- Don't expect your former spouse to be able to read your mind: explain your views as clearly as possible.
- Similarly, don't assume that you can read your former spouse's mind: ask that person to explain what he/she is thinking.
- Be willing to compromise where possible.

Communication Skills for Co-Parents

Here are some communication skills that you can develop to improve this process. These will work well with your child and with the other parent.

Active listening

Active listening is a skill you can develop to make sure that you understand what the sender is saying. It includes listening to the words said, watching the body language of the sender, hearing the tone of voice used, and interpreting what was said based on all of those clues. It involves repeating what you understand back to the sender to make sure that you are clear. Here are some tips for active listening:

1. Give your full attention to the person speaking. Get rid of distractions. If a radio or television is keeping you from hearing what someone is saying, turn it off.
2. Focus on the speaker's message by listening for the main idea. Try to get the point of what someone is saying rather than remembering every word.
3. Show your interest with your body and your eyes. Lean toward the speaker or get to your child's eye-level. Nod at or encourage the speaker by saying "Uh-huh" or "I see" quietly. Make eye contact.
4. Remember what the speaker has said. Repeat what you heard. The speaker can correct you, if necessary. When it's your turn to speak, tell what you understood by using a phrase like, "As I understand it, you said. . ." or "Sounds to me like..."
5. **For example**, if your child comes home from school, slams his books on the table and says, "I hate Ms. Taylor; she always picks on me," you can respond in a couple of ways.

You can say, "It's not nice to hate someone. I'm sure she doesn't really pick on you," or "Don't come in this house with that kind of attitude!"

OR "Sounds like you had a hard day at school. Would you tell me about it?"

- ✓ Which of these responses tells your child that you find his feelings important?
- ✓ Which encourages your child to say more about her or his problem and feelings?

Using “I” Messages

Communicating with “***I messages***” rather than “***You-messages***” is one key to successful communication with your co-parent.

You-messages sound like this: You just don't care ... You are a problem ...
Can't you ever? ... You are always sooo... ...

You Messages are often accusative and judgmental, placing blame on the other person. They tend to quickly shut down communication. Remember, you are communicating to make the family changes easier for your child!

I-Messages deal with facts. They are simple three-part statements that say how you feel when something happens or when your co-parent does something that bothers you. They also state clearly what change you want.

Here’s how to deliver an I Message:

| | |
|--|--|
| I feel... | Describe your feeling. |
| When you... | Describe what the other person does or what happens. |
| I would like for you to... OR I would appreciate it if... | Make a respectful request. |

Let’s look at an example:

“I feel really frustrated when you’re late picking up the kids. They worry that something has happened to you or that you might not come. I would like it if you would call to let us know if you are going to be late so that the kids won’t be worried.”

An *I message* is good to use because it does not blame the other person; it does not sound judgmental.

Compare the statement above with the following *you message*: “*You’re always late getting the kids. You just can’t be trusted. If you can’t be on time from now on, you can’t have the kids!*” How would you feel if your co-parent spoke to you in this way? How would you feel about the *I message*? *You messages* usually make the listener feel attacked and angry. The response is likely to be negative and lead to an argument. ***I messages usually result in a more helpful, cooperative response for solving the problem.***

Here is another example. You think the other parent has been spoiling the children by buying them a lot of things they do not need and that you can’t afford to give them. What could you say, using an *I message*?

How about the following?

“I feel like the bad guy when the kids come back from your place with lots of toys or presents because I can’t afford to give the children a lot of the things they want. I feel like we are in competition, and I am the loser. I’d like it if we could talk about what the children really need, and how often we should buy them extras.”

It takes some time for *I messages* to come naturally. Using the formula for an *I message* can help you think about what you want to say before you deliver the message. You might even want to write your message down to make sure it says what you feel and what you want without accusing the other person.

Changing the Message: Let’s Practice!

Change the following statements from *you messages* to *I messages*. Add your own issues in the extra blanks and try to make *I messages* to tell the other parent about your feelings.

| You message | I message |
|--|--|
| You’re always asking me to change my times with Amanda, but you are never willing to change your times when I ask. | I feel frustrated when I need to adjust my time with Amanda and you aren’t willing. I would like us to agree to be consistent with parenting schedules, but to be flexible when needed. I would like it also if we would check with each other in advance if a change is needed. |
| You must really let the kids go wild when they are with you, because they take forever to get settled down when they come back home. | |
| I hear you are letting your new lover spend the night with you when the kids are there. If you don’t kick him/her out, I won’t be letting the kids stay with you overnight anymore. | |
| You must not care about the children because you are late with the child support payment again. If you don’t come up with it by Friday, the kids won’t be going with you this weekend. | |
| You spend the child support money I send every month on things for yourself, and then you want more money from me. | |
| | |

Words Matter!

See this website <http://www.proudtoparent.com/files/JonPages/WordsMatter.html> for helpful tips on how to keep conversations with your co-parent on track. Take a look at the chart below to find some ways to talk which focus on solutions which help children.

Source: Parents' Corner – www.UpToParents.org

Words Matter: Some Helpful Words Between Co-Parents

| | |
|--|--|
| #1. "I'm interested in your ideas on this. Could we talk sometime soon?" "You really saved the day." | Let your co-parent know that you're genuinely open to his/her ideas. 1. "You're good with things like this—what do you think?" 2. "I bet if we sat down and put our ideas together, we could come up with a great solution." |
| #2. "Please." "Thanks!" "You're welcome." "You did that so well, and it meant a lot to the kids." | Such simple statements of courtesy between parents often spell the difference between hurting kids and literally saving them. |
| #3. "I just found out tonight's game starts an hour early." "Jessica needs to see the doctor next week." | Keep your co-parent informed. Co-parenting isn't a guessing game. It's a daily opportunity to build the team children need. |
| #4. "I want to help your plans work out if I possibly can." | Think often of what accommodations you can make for your children's sake. |
| #5. "I'm concerned about something and would really like your ideas on it. Could we talk when you have some time?" "Joey has a problem, and I'd feel better if I could hear your thoughts about it." | When problems come up, many couples find it's helpful to give each other some advance warning. 1. "I think we might have a situation we need to solve together." 2. "Something's come up I think we could help each other with." |
| #6. "Maybe we should talk about this later. Can we set aside some time?" | Many couples are helped by a "release word"—some agreed word or phrase that lets them both know that their emotional baskets are full for the moment. |

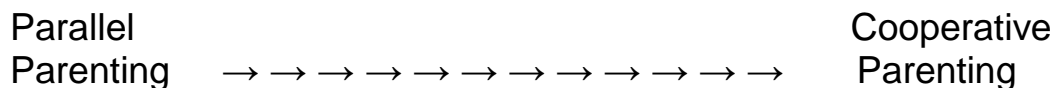
Ways to Co-Parent

There is more than one way to co-parent. Sometimes it is not possible or safe for divorced parents to work together to make decisions about their children. These parents can still have a co-parenting relationship that can keep their children out of the middle of their conflicts. This method of co-parenting is called **Parallel Parenting**. Parallel Parenting means that each parent assumes total responsibility for the children during the time they are in their care. One parent does not ask or expect the other to change schedules or rules. This helps parents avoid the arguments or fights that may happen when they try to make changes. Parallel parenting can reduce the amount of conflict for children and it is preferable to having a parent withdraw from the child's life altogether.

Cooperative Parenting is another way to co-parent. Cooperative Parenting happens when parents are able to put aside their differences and work together for the sakes of their children. These parents are able to keep their emotions under control when they see each other or talk with each other. Often, they are able to attend events or special occasions together that are important to their child or children. Though these parents may get angry with each other from time to time, they manage to keep their children out of their conflicts and can usually work out their differences in a way that is best for the children.

Many parents fall somewhere in between. In fact, early in the divorce process, parents may choose Parallel Parenting as their co-parenting method because they are unable to keep their anger in check. However, over time the hurts begin to heal and they are able to communicate without getting into a fight. This allows them to move toward Cooperative Parenting.

Co-Parenting



Tips for Successful Parallel Parenting

1. Remember that neither parent has control over the actions or activities of the other parent.
2. Use common courtesy and be business-like in your dealings with the other parent.
3. Do not plan activities for the children during the other parent's caretaking time (e.g., accepting birthday party invitations, enrolling the child in special activities).
4. If conflict occurs when you see the other parent, work to avoid contact between parents.
 - a. Pick up and drop off children at school, daycare, grandparents' or neighbors.'
 - b. Keep basic toys and clothes at each home so that moving from house-to-house will not take a lot of time.
 - c. Send notes, use e-mail, leave messages on answering machines, or have another person that both of you trust to deliver messages rather than speaking directly to the other parent.
 - d. Do not send a note for every little thing but wait until three or four messages have accumulated and send out one note.
5. If you are able to cooperate but the other parent is angry and/or hostile, then cooperative parenting probably won't work.
6. When parents must make decisions together, ask a third party (relative, friend, or mediator—not the children) to be the go-between.
7. Get all the information about a situation or problem before forming an opinion.
8. Follow up all agreements about vacations, medical appointments, school activities, time-sharing, etc., in writing, to avoid problems. A detailed parenting plan will be helpful.
9. When you are able to work together, you can be more flexible about schedules and rules. Remember, whatever decisions you make, think of what is best for the child.
10. Don't bring up old problems or hurts when talking about problems.
11. Keep adult divorce-related issues separate from child-related issues. Have separate discussions on each topic (for example, talk about division of property at a different time than children's dance class or soccer practices).

The goal is to reduce conflict. Eventually, many parents are able to work together, but it takes time.

Creating a Workable Co-Parenting Relationship

Cooperative communication patterns make it possible for you to continue being a source of support for your children.

Key points

- ❖ When a family is reorganized because of separation or divorce, the parenting responsibilities also need to be reorganized.
- ❖ A cooperative relationship between co-parents concerning parenting issues helps the children in their overall adjustment to the divorce or separation.
- ❖ Conflict between former partners is probably inevitable; what is important is how the conflict is managed.
- ❖ Destructive strategies for dealing with conflict hurt everyone in the family; constructive strategies create a more positive outcome.
- ❖ As we saw from the “Ages and Stages” charts on pages 26-29, children express their pain and anger differently at different stages of development. Kids may turn their anger and pain **inward**, by withdrawing, or **outward**, by acting out.

Why is It Important to Become Cooperative Co-Parents?

The potential benefits for parents and children from adopting a cooperative stance can be summarized as follows:

- Children benefit from having a positive and supportive relationship with both parents.
- Cooperative parenting reduces the levels of stress that echo throughout the entire family.
- The absence of communication between parents or the presence of conflicting communication hurts the child by placing him or her in the middle.

Learn not to criticize the other parent to your child. Use your adult friends or a counselor to express your anger.

- You can win in court and your child be the loser for life if you belittle the other parent to him/her.
- We know that putting the child in the middle creates confusion and loyalty conflicts and carries over when your child tries to form love relationships as a teen and adult.

What a Co-Parenting Arrangement Includes (This will form the basis for what you write in your Proposed Parenting Plan.)

Parents must decide what aspects of parenting to share. This will often depend on where children live, how often they see each of their parents, and the parents' ability to discuss issues with one another without conflict or rehashing the past.

Ask yourselves:

What decisions will you need to make? Some of the standard categories are decisions about education, religion, extracurricular activities, medical and mental health treatment, sporting events, and social activities.

How you will make the decisions? Will you talk with one another? Write letters? Write emails? Meet once a year over coffee to discuss the major decisions and how your children are doing?

How and when you will talk to your ex-spouse? For example, will you talk to each other only when a decision has to be made? Will you set up a regular time once a month to check in with each other? Will you send emails to each other?

How will you arrange and share schedules? When will the children see each of their parents? How flexible do you want to be in scheduling? What if your ex-spouse is 30 minutes late? How will you decide to deal with this? Will the schedule vary with school or summer schedule? Will the schedule change as children get older, and will the children have a say in what they want?

Who will arrange childcare when neither parent is available? If one parent is unavailable, will the other parent have first refusal? Will the children go to the same babysitter? Or will they have a different babysitter near each parent's home? How might extended family help out, and would this be beneficial for the family overall?

How will you handle discipline? Will each parent handle discipline on his or her own? If a child misbehaves at mom's house, should he be disciplined by both mom and dad? If a child misbehaves at school, will she receive discipline at both homes or just the home that she goes to after school?

What will happen in an emergency? Will parents notify each other before emergency medical treatment? Or after one parent has given consent for treatment? Have you exchanged all emergency contact information with your co-parent, such as work numbers, home numbers, cell phone numbers, etc.? Sometimes these change when couples get divorced. School officials and all caregivers should have this information as well.

Parenting Responsibility Guidelines

These guidelines are for parents who are able to work together without major conflict. If you have had violence in your relationship, cannot control your anger with each other, and get into heated arguments or fights when you must talk to each other, the parallel parenting plan may be a safer and more effective plan than cooperative parenting.

General Guidelines

The guidelines that follow are examples of positive parenting goals that can help children grow into healthy, happy, whole adults.

1. Both parents should spend time with their children as a way to help them grow and develop in a positive way.
2. Children need to know that it is OK to love both parents.
3. In general, parents should try to act respectfully toward each other, at least for the sakes of their children.
4. Each parent should show respect for the other's views about how to raise the children. Where possible, rules should be the same in each house. For example, if one parent does not want the children to have toy guns, the other parent should consider that parent's feelings when buying toys.
5. Each parent has the right to know where the children are when they are with the other parent. Also, each parent should know who the children are with (such as a babysitter or friend) if they are not with the other parent.
6. The parents should discuss and try to agree on where children should attend worship services, if they attend. Parents should agree on a plan for taking the children to worship and other religious activities.
7. It is very important that each parent let the other know his/her current address and home and work phone numbers for emergency situations.
8. Both parents should realize that parenting schedules may change as children grow older and have different needs.

Parenting Responsibility DOs

The following suggestions represent ways to carry out your parenting responsibilities.

- 1. Be respectful of the schedules of the other parent and the children.**
 1. Let the other parent know ahead of time if you must change your scheduled time with your child.
 2. Remember to give the other parent your vacation schedule ahead of time. If possible, give him or her a list of places and phone numbers where you can be reached on the trip.
 3. Remember that your children may have plans that will affect your time with them.

- 2. Make parenting responsibilities a normal part of life.**
 1. Find activities that give you and your children the chance to build your relationship but also allow some time without planned activities, just to be together.
 2. Provide a balance between fun and responsibilities (chores, homework) for your children.
 3. Include grandparents and extended family in the time spent with your child.
 4. Make sure that your children have places in your home that belong to them—even if it's just a section of a room— so that it can be their home, too.
 5. Help your children get to know others in the neighborhood so that they can have friends in both homes.
 6. Keep to a routine and a schedule in preparing your children for time with the other parent.
 7. Have a checklist of items that children need to bring/take (clothing, toys, etc.).
 8. Sometimes, if it is OK, allow your children to bring friends along.
 9. Spend some time alone with each of your children.

- 3. Be a reliable and responsible parent.**
 1. Show up on time.
 2. Inform the other parent and your child if a new person/partner (babysitter or new romantic partner, etc.) will be part of the time together.
 3. Share changes in address, telephone numbers, jobs, etc.

Parenting Responsibility DON'Ts

Some parents use time with the children as a way to get revenge on the other parent. They may believe that what they are doing is best for the child. However, using children to get revenge on the other parent will make it even more difficult to work with the other parent for the sake of your children. It may seriously damage the relationship between the children and one or both parents. Destructive strategies can hurt children deeply when they are caught in the middle.

Destructive goals are based on one parent seeking to hurt the other parent, to disrupt his or her life, or to get revenge for past or present hurts. Destructive strategies hurt children the most.

How to avoid destructive strategies:

Communicate with your former partner.

- Do not use your children as messengers on divorce-related issues, such as child support. Those issues should be discussed by the adults only.
- Don't make your children responsible for making, canceling, or changing parenting time plans. Those are adult responsibilities.
- Do not use your children to spy on your former spouse.
- Do not use drop-off and pick-up times as opportunities to fight with the other parent.
- Deal with important issues in a separate meeting or telephone call when your children cannot overhear.

Try not to hurt your children's relationship with the other parent.

- Do not try to make your children feel guilty about spending time with their other parent.
- Do not use time with the other parent as a reward for good behavior by your children, and do not withhold time with the other parent as punishment for poor behavior.
- Do not tell your children that you feel lonely and sad when they spend time with the other parent.
- Do not withhold parenting time to punish your former spouse for past wrongs or to get even for missed child-support payments. Withholding parenting time will punish your children, who are not guilty.
- Do not withhold parenting time because you feel your former spouse does not deserve to see the children. Except in the case where a parent is a genuine threat to the children, parents and children need and deserve to see each other.
- Do not make false allegations of abuse to justify withholding time with the other parent.

- Try not to let activities (sports, hobbies, etc.) interfere with time your children need to spend with the other parent. Instead, try to involve the other parent in supporting those activities by taking the children where they need to go or joining in the activities.
- Do not pressure your children about clothes, toys, and other items left at the other parent's home. Children need to feel they belong in both homes.
- Do not falsely claim that your children are sick to justify not spending time with the other parent.
- Do not withhold phone calls to the children from the other parent.
- Do not refer to the other parent's new romantic partner in a negative way.

Do not allow your anger against your partner to affect your relationship with your children.

- Do not hurt your children by failing to show up for parenting time or by being late, in order to punish the other parent.

Do not try to buy your children's loyalty or love.

- Do not let your children blackmail you by refusing to spend time with you unless you buy them something.
- Do not feel you have to be your children's best friend or buddy in order for time together to be successful. Your children need you to be a parent.
- Do not feel you have to fill every minute of time together with activities. Allow some down time for routine activities together, such as cooking or doing laundry, or time just to be quiet together.

*Destructive strategies undercut the children's ability to develop an open and supportive relationship with one or both parents. When one or both parents continue to use destructive strategies, they are involved in an activity called game playing. **In game playing, there are never any winners. All sides lose in self-respect and in respect for one another, and everyone, especially the children, gets hurt.***

Foundations for Sharing Parenting Responsibilities

The following are some positive strategies for parenting after a divorce or separation.

1. Make it clear that you value your child's time with you and with the other parent.
2. Work out a fair and practical time-sharing schedule as soon as possible.
3. Do your best to meet the terms of the parenting plan.
4. Tell the other parent in advance about necessary changes in plans.
5. Try to be reasonably flexible in your time-sharing schedule to meet each parent's and the child's needs.
6. Be positive with your child about the upcoming time with the other parent.
7. Do not discuss with the other parent things about which you have conflict when you meet to transfer your child.
8. Do not use your child as a confidante, messenger, bill collector, or spy.
9. Listen to your child concerning problems with the other parent, but encourage your child to work out the problems with the other parent directly.
10. Work on your problems with the other parent in private.

New Family Relationships: Restructuring After Divorce

The form of the family changes when parents divorce. Children have no choice in the changes that occur in their families because of divorce or when non-marital relationships end. Children usually want a relationship with both parents, but they may think they have to take sides, especially if parents continue to argue. As hard as these changes are for children, when new people come into their lives, such as parents' dating partners or stepparents, stepsiblings, and/or half-brothers or sisters, things can get even more difficult. How should parents handle these new relationships in the family?

Dating

- Most experts recommend that individuals who are divorced not date seriously for at least one year after a divorce.

This allows you time to heal from the hurts of the divorce and to develop an identity as an individual. Allowing time between divorce and dating can help you think about what you want in a new relationship. It allows parents time to adjust to the changes in their relationships with their children and to become stable and set up routines that can help their children feel secure.

What about the Children?

When you are ready to begin dating again, you should be careful to avoid hurting your children even more. It is best to start slowly. Some parents date only when their children are with the other parent. Experts say that a parent should not introduce the dating partner to the children until he or she is sure the relationship is serious, or it may set the children up for another loss, if that relationship does not work out. Tell your child about the new relationship when your dating partner is not present. That will allow your child to express his or her feelings more freely. Make sure your child knows that your new partner will not replace the child's other parent and that you will not interfere with your child's relationship with the other parent.

- Most experts recommend not involving your children with any new partner for at least six months after the divorce.

This translates to parents not spending the night with dating partners when their children are with them for a number of months. This can be an awkward situation for the child and create discomfort for everyone.

Parents should not expect their children to become close to the new dating partner any time soon. Children may feel like they are not loyal to their biological parent when they like the other parent's new partner. Therefore, they may refuse to establish a relationship with the new partner even if they like that person.

A Note for Never-married Parents

Because parents who do not marry do not have a legally recognized relationship in the state of West Virginia, the laws that govern divorce do not apply to the dissolution of those relationships. This makes decisions regarding custody and splitting up of property potentially more complicated than in divorce situations. West Virginia law does provide that courts overseeing custody issues for never-married parents (usually juvenile courts) can require parents to complete a parenting plan and may require other components such as mediation and a co-parenting class as well.

It is very important for never-married parents to work together to develop parenting plans that are in the best interests of their children, especially if they want children to have access to both parents. Mediation may be especially helpful to never-married parents because it will allow both parents to have a say in how their children are parented and to make a plan that is best for all involved. Fathers especially can benefit from mediation because it is more flexible than a court will be in making a parenting plan that includes both parents.

Remember, when it is safe, children usually do best when they have ample access to both parents and know that they are loved and cared for by both of them. Making that happen will take a lot of determination and commitment from both parents.

A free website, Proud to Parent, has been developed especially for parents who have never been married to each other and are co-parenting one or more children. You can access the website at www.proudtoparent.org.

Resources for Parents and Children about Divorce

Denise Brandon, Ph.D. University of Tennessee Extension

Selected Co-Parenting Websites

Shared Parenting Information Group (SPIG) United Kingdom

www.spig.clara.net

Promotes responsible shared parenting after separation and divorce.

Up to Parents

www.uptoparents.org

Free, confidential, and interactive website for divorcing and divorced parents. It helps parents focus on protecting their children from unnecessary hurt, turmoil, and expense.

There are helpful handouts and links to videos. Look also under the Professionals Section to see videos of kids talking about divorce.

Coparenting 101

<http://coparenting101.org/ten-commandments-of-co-parenting/>

Coparenting Ten Commandments

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)

www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

An interdisciplinary policy research center dedicated to research and practice that expands the knowledge base on father involvement and family development, and informs policy designed to improve the well-being of children.

Proud to Parent

www.proudtoparent.org

Free, confidential, and eye-opening website for parents never married to each other

While We Heal- A free, confidential, and engaging website for parents intending to stay married but wishing to remember their children's needs as they work through marital problems - www.whileweheal.org

Ohio State Extension Service http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/Parents_Help_Children_Divorce.pdf Parenting Fact Sheet
“What Parents can Do to Help Children Adjust to Divorce”

University of Minnesota Extension Service

Helping Children Understand Divorce

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/00237.html>

University of Missouri free publication

National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (NERMEN). Information about dating, marriage, remarriage and step-couples - www.nermen.org

National Stepfamilies Resource Center - The National Stepfamily Resource Center serves as a clearinghouse of information that links research on stepfamilies and best practices in work with couples and children in stepfamilies - www.stepfamilies.info

Or search online “Co-Parenting Divorce”

PBS Kids – It’s My Life - Divorce – a website to help children deal with their parents’ divorce - <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/divorce/>

Books for Divorcing Spouses:

Deits, B. (2000). *Life After Loss: A Personal Guide Dealing with Death, Divorce, Job Change, and Relocation.* a(Third Edition). Cambridge, MA: Fisher.
The author, a pastoral counselor for 25 years, provides information on how to recover from painful loss, including the death of a loved one or friend, divorce, relocation, job loss, retirement, major surgery or onset of chronic illness. It includes exercises and charts for working through your grief.

Emery, R. D. (2004). *The Truth About Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions so You and Your Children Can Thrive.* New York: Penguin.
This book covers topics such as why it is so hard to make divorce work, how anger and fighting keep people connected, why legal matters should be one of the last tasks, why parental love and limits can be the best therapy for children, how to create workable parenting schedules, and more.

Fisher, B., & Alberti, R. E. (2005). *Rebuilding When Your Relationship Ends* (Third Edition). Atascadero, CA: Impact.
Based on the work of divorce therapist, Dr. Bruce Fisher, this book offers information and practical self-help procedures for rebuilding your life after divorce. These straightforward, life-affirming resources can help make the divorce process easier, healthier, and less painful, leading to more-fulfilled lives and stronger "second-time" relationships.

For Couples Considering Reconciliation:

Chapman, G. & Thomas, J. (2006). *The Five Languages of Apology.* Chicago: Northfield.
The authors identify five fundamental aspects of “languages” of apology. Readers can enhance their relationships by recognizing their own primary ways of apologizing and learning how to speak the languages of those they love.

Davis, M. W. (2001). *The Divorce Remedy: The Proven 7-Step Program for Saving Your Marriage*. New York: Fireside.

This book outlines a seven-step process for managing marital problems including, avoiding the divorce trap, setting specific marriage-saving goals, moving beyond hurtful ways of interacting, doing what works, and overcoming marriage problems.

Davis, M. W. (1992). *Divorce Busting: A Step-By-Step Approach to Making Your Marriage Loving Again*. New York: Fireside.

The author gives straightforward advice on how couples can stay together instead of coming apart. She uses case histories to illustrate marriage-enriching, divorce-preventing techniques, which can be used even if only one partner participates.

Johnson, S. (2008). *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. New York: Hachette Book Group.

In this book, Dr. Johnson shares her groundbreaking and remarkably successful program for helping couples create stronger, more secure relationships through seven healing and transforming conversations.

Raffel, L. (1997). *Should I Stay or Go? How Controlled Separation (CS) Can Save Your Marriage*. Chicago: Contemporary Books.

In this book, the author provides couples considering divorce a new option--Controlled Separation (CS). The author explains CS and shows how it can be used as a tool to help couples make the best decision for both partners.

Books for Parents to Help Children Get Through Divorce:

Coleman, W. L. (1998). *What Children Need to Know When Parents Get Divorced: A Book to Read With Children Going Through the Trauma of Divorce*.

Minneapolis: Bethany House.

Practical Help for Children Ages 6 to 12 from a Licensed Family Counselor. Read this book with your children as a way of starting your children on the road to emotional healing. This book is written in short, devotional-style chapters that discuss concerns children may have concerning divorce. Reading together provides parents and children an opportunity to talk about subjects that may be bothering the child but not come up in the regular daily routine.

Lansky, V. (1996). *Vicki Lansky's Divorce Book for Parents* (Third Revised Edition). Minnetonka, MN: Book Peddlers.

This book is a guide to help parents tell their children about divorce, what behavior to expect and practical tips from dealing with holidays to dating.

Long, N., & Forehand, R. (2002). *Making Divorce Easier on Your Child: 50 Effective Ways to Help Children Adjust*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Making Divorce Easier on Your Child provides parents with 50 effective strategies and action steps for helping kids cope with divorce. It is written in a convenient,

quick-bite format. It is based on the authors' years of clinical experience dealing with the children of divorce, as well as their extensive research into the causes and cures of divorce-related emotional problems.

Neuman, M. G. (1998). *Helping Your Children Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. New York: Times Books.

This book discusses the painful and confusing process of divorce. It deals with topics such as building a co-parenting relationship, when you or your child should see a therapist, suggestions for talking with your children about sensitive issues, how to stop fighting with your ex-spouse and much more.

Ricci, I. (1997). *Mom's House, Dad's House: A Complete Guide for Parents Who Are Separated, Divorced, or Remarried*. New York: Fireside.

This book addresses the legal, financial, and emotional realities of creating two happy and stable homes for children who have experienced their parents' divorce. It deals with the challenges of creating strong working relationships between parents to make two loving homes for their children.

Teyber, E. (2001). *Helping Children Cope With Divorce* (Revised Edition). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Named one of the 10 Best Parenting Books of the Year by *Child* magazine, this revised edition teaches you to minimize stress during initial breakups and ultimate separation, explain divorce so children don't blame themselves, protect children from parental hostilities and navigate conflicts of loyalty and alliance.

Thayer, E., & Zimmerman, J. (2001). *The Co-Parenting survival Guide: Letting go of Conflict after a Difficult Divorce*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger.

This book helps parents in the aftermath of divorce learn to sustain a healthy co-parenting relationship. The authors discuss parental conflict and its effects on children, conflict resolution and the importance of forging a co-parenting relationship. Additionally, there are suggestions for solving day-to-day problems, disciplining and handling conflict during transitional times and special events.

Wallerstein, J. S., & Blakeslee, S. (2004) *What About the Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During, and After Divorce*. New York: Hyperion.

This book is a guide for parents who are thinking about divorce, who are in the process of getting a divorce, or who split up a few or even many years ago and are concerned about how their children are doing in the post-divorce family. It describes the changes that parents will experience in those first few days, weeks, and months after the decision is made and what they can do to take control and stay in control of their lives.

Wolf, A. E. (1998). *Why Did You Have to Get a Divorce? And When Can I Have a Hamster: A Guide to Parenting Through Divorce*. New York: Noonday Press.

Parental divorce does not have to do long-term damage to a child, according to the author. This guide helps divorcing and divorced parents with things like how to talk

with your children about divorce, how to keep children out of the middle and how to maintain strong ties with your children if you are not the primary residential parent.

Books for Children Going Through their Parents' Divorce:

Pre-School and Young Children

Abercrombie, B. (1990). *Charlie Anderson*. New York: Aladdin.

Elizabeth, Sarah and Charlie have a contemporary story that takes into account the changing character of the family unit. This story is simply told with beautiful illustrations.

Johnston, J. R., Breunig, K., Garrity, C., & Baris, M. (1997). *Through the Eyes of Children: Healing Stories for Children of Divorce*. New York: The Free Press. This book presents fifteen fables that illustrate the core concerns that children face when their parents' divorce. It is designed for parents to read to their young children. It also includes a section on how parents can make up their own stories to illustrate concerns their children may be facing.

Lansky, V., & Prince, J. (illustrator) (1998). *It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear*. Minnetonka, MN: Book Peddlers.

Koko Bear helps very young children learn that they are loved and will be cared for, even though their parents are divorced. The book also contains tips for parents on each page. (Also available in Spanish.)

Levins, S. & Langdo, B. (2005). *Was It the Chocolate Pudding: A Story for Little Kids about Divorce*. American Psychological Association.

This story, narrated by a young boy living with his single father and brother, explains divorce and its grown-up words from a kid's point-of-view. Emphasis is placed on the fact that divorce is not the child's fault. This book deals with practical day-to-day matters such as single-family homes, joint custody, child-care issues, and misunderstandings.

Masurel, C., & MacDonald, K. (illustrator) (2001). *Two Homes*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick.

This book helps very young children, whose parents have divorced, identify the positive things about their two homes.

Ransom, J. F., & Finney, K. K. (illustrator) (2000). *I Don't Want To Talk About It*. Washington, DC: Magination Press.

This book, for children ages 4-8, talks about the emotions a young girl feels when her parents decide to divorce. It discusses what the parents tell her to reassure her of their love and how they will continue to take care of her.

Rogers, F. (1996). *Let's Talk About It: Divorce*. New York: PaperStar.

Written in Mister Rogers' calm, straightforward style, this book describes children's emotions that often accompany their parents' divorce and suggests ways they can deal with them. This book is appropriate for children ages 3 to 7.

Seward, A. & Ferreiro, D. (illustrator) (2000). *Goodnight, Daddy*. Buena Park, CA: Morning Glory.

This book will be helpful for children who are struggling with a parent who does not follow through with the parenting time schedule and does not see the child as promised. There are also suggestions for the primary residential parent dealing with this situation.

Schmitz, T. (2008). *Standing on My Own Two Feet: A Child's Affirmation of Love in the Midst of Divorce*. Penguin Group.

Addison is a regular kid whose parents are going through a divorce, but just as he has two strong feet to stand on so will his parents.

Thomas, S., Rankin, D., & Thompson, H (1997). *Divorced but still my Parents: A Helping Book about Divorce for Children and Parents*. Springboard.

Parents can read through this book with their children to help them deal with their emotions in a gentle and supportive way. The most common problems and worries faced by children are included.

Older Children and Teens:

Atchison, L. (2003). *ABCs of Surviving Divorce: Important Tips for Parents, Teens & Children*. Authorhouse.

This book contains three sections—one for parents, one for teens, and one for children. The author survived her own parents' divorce when she was a teenager. She shares the struggles she faced and offers suggestions for how parents and children can successfully navigate this process.

Bienfield, F. (2002). *My Mom and Dad are Getting a Divorce*. Authorhouse.

A book for ages 9 to 12 about a young girl's feelings about her parent's divorce and how she and her parents cope with all of the emotions involved. The book includes a counseling guide for parents, teachers and counselors.

Holyoke, N., & Nash, S. (illustrator) (1999). *Help! A Girl's Guide to Divorce and Stepfamilies*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company.

The breakup of her parents can turn a girl's world upside down. This third title in the Help! Series answers girls' letters on every aspect of divorce—from the initial split-up to a parent's remarriage—and encourages conversation with parents when it's needed most. The book includes tips and quizzes plus advice from girls who have wisdom to share.

Hunt, A. E. (2000). *Keeping Your Life Together When Your Parents Pull Apart: A Teen's Guide to Surviving Divorce.* Lincoln, NE: iUniverse.com.

This story of how two teens deal with the break up of their family explores the feelings, emotions and family turmoil that come with such a life-changing event for children. Young readers are assured of the validity of their feelings with wisdom, hope and guidance from the Bible.

Krementz, J. (1988). *How It Feels When Parents Divorce.* New York: Knopf.

Nineteen boys and girls, from seven to sixteen years old and from highly diverse backgrounds, share their deepest feelings about their parents' divorces. This book can help children of divorced parents find constructive ways to help themselves through this difficult time.

MacGregor, C. (2004). *The Divorce Helpbook for Teens.*

The Divorce Helpbook for Teens is a guide for teenagers dealing with their parents' divorce. It addresses young people in plain terms without talking down to them and covers such common questions as why parents get divorced, how divorce changes people's lives, how to say "no" to parents who are putting their child in the middle, what to talk about when visiting a parent who moved away and more.

Books for Stepfamilies

For Parents

Deal, R. L. (2002). *The Smart Step-Family: Seven Steps to a Healthy Family.*

Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

Written from a Christian perspective, this book deals with the realities of stepfamilies and the myths of blended families. It provides practical, realistic solutions to the issues that stepfamilies face.

Frisbie, D. & Frisbie, L. (2005). *Happily Remarried: Making Decisions Together * Blending Families Successfully * Building a Love That Will Last.* Eugene, OR: Harvest House

David and Lisa Frisbie share the fruits of more than 20 years of speaking, teaching, and counseling from a Christian perspective. The authors use many real-life examples and speak with hope and humor about the challenges. With further step-by-step marriage-saving advice about forming a new family unit and helpful discussion questions, *Happily Remarried* makes a great how-to recipe for a successful, happy remarriage.

Oxhorn-Ringwood, L., Oxhorn, L., & Krausz, M. V. (2002). *Step-Wives: Ten Steps to Help Ex-Wives and Stepmothers End the Struggle and Put the Kids First.* New York: Fireside.

This book is written by two women who refer to themselves as stepwives, as the former and current wife of the same man. They had a barely civil relationship for ten

years, but with the assistance of a marriage and family therapist, they developed a ten-step program that took them from enemies to CoMamas.

Pickhardt, C. E. (1997). *Keys to Successful Step-Fathering*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's.

This guide helps stepfathers ease into their new role by developing realistic expectations, building relationships with their stepchildren, managing conflict, establishing authority, and communicating positively.

Wisdom, S. & Green, J. (2002). *Stepcoupling: Creating and Sustaining a Strong Marriage in Today's Blended Family*. New York: Three Rivers

The authors offer advice for stepcouples on dealing with different parenting styles, finances, relationships with ex-spouses, legal matters, and much more while strengthening their blended family with a healthy marriage. Includes advice from stepcouples on dealing with the issues remarried couples face.

➤ **For Children**

Cohn, L. & Glasser, D. (2008). *The Step-Tween Survival Guide: How to Deal with Life in a Stepfamily*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit

This book is designed to help tweens deal with stepparents, stepsiblings, invasion of privacy, and changes in household rules. The authors interviewed real stepkids, and came up with suggestions for ways to help them cope and anticipate some positive outcomes.

Levins, S. & Langdo, B. (2005). *Do You Sing Twinkle?: A Story About Remarriage and New Family*. American Psychological Association.

This book, told from a young boy's point of view, addresses many questions that children may have while adjusting to remarriage and joint-custody situations. Kids and parents will learn good ways to stay connected while helping kids to feel special and loved.

McCann, M. & Gardener, P. (2001). *Chelsea's Tree: A story for Step Children and Stepkids*. Woodstock, VA: Inspiration

This book is a beautifully illustrated story that includes activities, maps, stickers, and a photo album section. Geared to stepchildren and children of blended families. Written for children ages 3 – 7, Chelsea's Tree is a charming, original way to help a child make sense of his or her world.

Rogers, F. (1997). *Let's Talk About It: Stepfamilies*. New York: Puffin.

Mister Rogers talks about stepfamilies in a way that is appropriate for preschool and young children.