

Children of Divorced Parents

The best thing you can do for yourself and your child during and after your divorce is give them every opportunity to communicate and share their feelings about the divorce.

“When children receive group counseling at the beginning stages of their parent’s divorce, they show positive developments in social relationships, dramatic improvements in their academic grades, and increased growth in their emotional and psychological stability.” [”Circle of Friends,” Jenni Silberstein, MA, *The California Therapist*, July/August 2002, pg. 68-69].

Without support, children and adolescents can be burying and internalizing their fears, anger and sadness, only to surface at a later date. The confusion that comes with a divorce can be overwhelming for all who are involved, but especially the children. Family has been associated with feelings of safety, security and loyalty. Therefore when parents choose to end the marriage, children can feel that they have also lost their family and all that comes with that. They are not sure who they can depend on for what, and want to protect themselves and their parents from all the negative feelings that surface during a divorce.

Children need support. A safe place where they can express themselves, without worrying about how they will affect the listener. Children need to know their parents are taking care of themselves, and that as much as possible, life will go on as usual. Unfortunately parents are often struggling too. They have suddenly become single parents, with all the responsibilities that follow. Financial hardship, social isolation, co-parenting with their ex while negative feelings linger over the ending of their marriage, and additional stresses such as caring for their parents, or other unexpected challenges, can make it difficult for parents to meet their children’s needs.

Everyone feels in need of care, parents and children. This is where individual and group therapy can help.

Everyone needs to have their feelings normalized and validated. Everyone needs someone neutral to listen as they sort through their feelings.

Parents also need to model healthy ways of caring for themselves. Children need to know that it is okay to ask for help. They need to know that avoiding their feelings by becoming workaholics, perfectionists, or dependent on substances in order to “check out” are only going to make things worse. Like a balloon that keeps getting hot air blown into it, eventually it will pop. Like a volcano, with hot lava accumulating under the surface, eventually it will erupt.

Children need the reassurance that they can trust and hope and depend on others in their future. Parents need to show them by modeling healthy ways of coping and relating. There is no benefit from blaming and criticizing. It will only hurt the child’s self-esteem and make them feel more isolated and hurt. Children need to feel good about both of their parents in order to develop a healthy identity which comes from respect and love.