

Parents R 4-Ever

Session 2 - Impact of Divorce on Children

Children most often experience the same changes and emotions as their parents. Parents need to recognize their children's feelings and assist them in developing appropriate coping skills.

Telling Children About Divorce

- Put into words:
 - What is happening
 - What is going to happen
 - Stress care, support, protection, and love.
- Both parents together should tell all the children at the same time about the divorce
- In planning the conversation, think:
 - What does my child need to know?
 - What should I not tell my child?
 - What may be the greatest worries for my child?
 - How can we as parents reassure our child?
- Listen carefully to what the child is saying and feeling!

Sources of Stress For Children

- Restructuring the family
- Losses associated with separation and divorce
- Fear of abandonment
- Hostility between parents

Understanding Your Child's Behavior

- Often children feel caught in the middle
- In general, children of all ages feel guilty
- Most children wish their parents would get back together again
 - Young children fantasize that they can reunite their parents.
 - Older children may get into trouble or become ill to bring their parents together to help them.
- Children express their pain and anger differently at different stages of development
- They may turn the anger and pain inward by withdrawing or outward by acting out
- Children go through the same stages of grief as adults.

Indicators of Children's Adjustment

- Bon-adaptation
 - Probably be doing satisfactory work in school
 - Be reasonably active in social and recreational activities
 - Be getting along with other children.
- Mal-adaptation
 - May be acting aggressively,
 - Refusing to listen to adults
 - Otherwise misbehaving.
 - Some children may be withdrawing and becoming depressed.

Factors That Affect a Child's Adjustment and Reaction

- Regular dependable visits and involvement from the non-residential parent
- The situation prior to the divorce/separation
- The custodial parent's ease in adjusting to the divorce
- Parenting skills of both parents, agreement on child rearing, discipline
- Approval and a stable, loving relationship with both parents.
- Openness to discussing the divorce with parents
- Degree of conflict between parents
- Economic hardship
- Other added stressors (moving, changing schools, parental remarriage etc.)

Helping Children Through Divorce: Coping Strategies

Reassurance	Encouragement	Honesty	Security
Stability	Fairness	Support	Trust

Other Strategies for Helping Children Cope

- *Read books with your children* – Children can sometimes relate to the book's characters.
- *Play with your child and observe them in play* – children often express feelings through play.
- *Talk with your child* – ask open-ended questions in order to encourage the child to share feelings, as well as thoughts.

Summary

With preparation, education, patience and good communication skills, parents can help children develop the skills needed and provide the kind of experiences and support with which children can adjust and adapt more successfully to separation and divorce.