

# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

*A Parent & Children's Worker's Guide*



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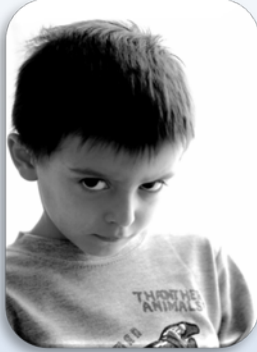
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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Parent & Children's Worker's Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Anger*

**ANGER:** a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a wrong; wrath; ire. (from dictionary.com)



**Why Anger?** Kids whose parents have gotten, or are getting, a divorce are undergoing tremendous upheaval in their lives. In addition to the loss of their intact family unit, many experience changes in schools, friends, homes and much more. Anger can be a natural reaction to all of these life changes that come with divorce and are outside of their control. Some children resent their parents for not keeping the family together. Many lash out in anger as a reaction to underlying feelings of fear and insecurity. Anger is one of the most common reactions to divorce in children and one you must be prepared to deal with.

### Early Warning Signs:

- Tense Body
- Clenched Teeth
- Increased Volume
- Unkind Words
- Change of Tone
- Easily Provoked
- Restlessness
- Deep Breathing
- Rolling Eyes

### IDEAS FOR HELPING AN ANGRY CHILD

- Stay calm.
- Teach appropriate ways to express anger.
- Teach children to recognize and name emotions.
- Listen to them without trying to fix it.
- Have them stop, breath and relax.
- Do breathing exercises (from the diaphragm).
- Walk out of the room (remove the audience).
- Go outside with them (walk, play, ride a bike).
- Give them physical activity (running, sports, etc.)
- Give them choices (empower them).
- Have them take long baths (water sooths).
- Find art activities for them to participate in.
- Set limits and boundaries and stick to them.

### Scripture References About Anger

Ps. 4:4	Ecc. 7:9
Ps. 30:4-5	Mt. 5:22
Ps. 37:8	Eph 4:26-27
Ps. 145:8	Eph 4:31-32
Prov. 14:29	Col 3:8
Prov. 15:1	Jm 1:19-20
Prov. 16:32	



1. Anger is a process that needs to be worked through.
2. Don't look for ways to change a child. There is no quick fix!
3. Deal with your own anger issues first.
4. Get professional help when needed.

### The Anger Mask

Anger often masks other emotions like:

- Anxiety
- Confusion
- Danger
- Depression
- Fear
- Grief
- Guilt
- Powerlessness
- Sadness
- Shame



Helping kids to talk about their anger is the first step in helping them to overcome it! Help children to talk about and name their emotions!

### CHECK YOURSELF!!!

Many times when children exhibit anger after a divorce, it is because they are modeling or mimicking behavior that they have seen from one or both of their parents. It is perfectly normal for you and/or your ex to be angry about the divorce, but if you are seeing anger in your child, you both need to check your own attitudes to ensure that you are not exhibiting your own anger either through words or actions in front of your children.



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Anxiety*

**ANXIETY:** distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger or misfortune.  
(from dictionary.com)

### Types of Anxiety:

- General Anxiety
- Separation Anxiety
- Social Anxiety
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress
- Panic Attacks
- Phobias

### Scripture References About Anxiety

Neh. 8:10	Mt. 6:25-34
Ps. 34:4	Mt. 11:28
Ps. 46:10	Jn. 16:33
Ps. 55:22-23	Phil. 4:6-7
Prov. 3:5-8	Phil. 4:19
Prov. 12:25	Heb. 13:6
Is. 41:10	1 Pt. 5:6-7

**ANXIETY...A SILENT KILLER!** Worry is a normal part of everyday life, but when that worry interferes with a child's ability to accomplish normal everyday tasks it has risen to the level of anxiety. Numerous studies indicate that anxiety is a common reaction in children of divorce. Anxiety is often a reaction to the various stressors that a child faces when parents' divorce and can paralyze a child and/or stunt their development. Children are faced with a multitude of emotions stemming from a divorce that their young minds are incapable of processing and dealing with. This will oftentimes lead to anxiety. Children can suffer from separation anxiety or may simply have an unexplainable fear of some bad thing which is "bound to happen." Many anxious children may be quiet and complacent leading them to suffer in silence.

### CAUSES OF ANXIETY AFTER DIVORCE

- Feelings of abandonment
- Changes in living condition
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Concerns about additional separation
- Fear of future unknown troubles that feel imminent
- Less access to parents because of deteriorating relationship or distance
- Decrease in income following divorce
- General worry
- Fear for parents

### HELPING AN ANXIOUS CHILD

- ✓ Minimize stress
- ✓ Deal with your own emotions
- ✓ Talk about their fears over and over
- ✓ Help your child put emotions into words
- ✓ Don't dismiss feelings
- ✓ Be willing to listen
- ✓ Offer comfort and distraction
- ✓ Be realistic in responding
- ✓ Offer reassurance where you can
- ✓ Offer a stable environment
- ✓ Provide for regular exercise
- ✓ Consult a counselor when needed



### SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

- |                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| • Nausea         | • Developmental regression             |
| • Diarrhea       | • Overly self-critical                 |
| • Headaches      | • High need for reassurance            |
| • Stomachaches   | • Pulls back from existing friendships |
| • Dizziness      |  |
| • Nervousness    |  |
| • Moodiness      |  |
| • Clingy         |  |
| • Demanding      |  |
| • Sleep Problems |  |

### Lead by Example

Children are very perceptive and will sense a parent's fears and anxieties picking up on words, actions and subtle clues from their parents. When children sense anxiousness from a parent, it will only serve to heighten the child's own anxiety. While parents should certainly find someone to talk to about their own anxieties, kids are not appropriate confidants.

*"Divorce thrusts the child into anxiety because it strikes the dependability of the social unit that is responsible for his or her being. It thrusts a division within the child's own identity. The child is cared for and need not fear for his next meal, for example, but he is anxious, for the very union that is responsible for his existence has regretted and aborted its unity of being... Anxiety nestles deep within him, whispering questions to his very existence." Andrew Root The Children of Divorce*



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Chaos*

**CHAOS:** a state of utter confusion or disorder; a total lack of organization or order.  
(from dictionary.com)

**Chaos Reigns!!!** No matter what you might have heard from your kids, children like structure and predictability! There is comfort and familiarity in structure. It's like a security blanket that keeps them warm and comforts them. Divorce changes all that. The structure that children have grown up with and come to expect is suddenly and dramatically changed. Parents leave. Belongings are packed up. People move. Schools change. Money dwindles. Time shrinks. Relationships change. Church becomes a thing of the past. Divorce brings two houses, two schedules, two sets of rules and too much for a child to keep up with. Rather than living under the security blanket of routine and structure, kids are thrust into a whirlwind of chaos and confusion. These feelings of chaos often lead to stress and other emotional reactions in children of divorce.



### Scripture References About Chaos & Peace

Gen. 1:2	Mt 11:28-30
Ps. 23	Jn. 14:27
Ps. 37:1-5	Jn. 16:33
Ps. 42:11	Rom. 5:1
Ps. 119:50	1 Cor. 14:33
Is. 12:2	1 Cor. 14:40
Is. 26:3	Phil. 4:6-7

### IDEAS FOR PARENTS

- ✓ Create routines for your kids
- ✓ Be flexible and adaptable
- ✓ Be consistent between kids
- ✓ Spend alone time with each child
- ✓ Keep a calendar
- ✓ Maintain clear rules and structure
- ✓ Enforce the rules
- ✓ Have everything your child needs at each house
- ✓ Make sure kids feel "at home" in both houses
- ✓ Keep kids aware of, and involved in, the calendar
- ✓ Allow time between major changes
- ✓ Communicate with your kids and ex
- ✓ Minimize chaos in your own life
- ✓ Co-parent effectively and calmly
- ✓ Don't fight in front of your kids
- ✓ Let kids be kids

### IDEAS FOR WORKING WITH KIDS

The bond you have with the child of divorce in your church, school or ministry may be the most stable relationship that child has during a divorce. You can be a source of stability and consistency for them in the midst of the storm they are going through.

The single most important thing you can do is point the child to God and remind them that God creates order out of chaos. The second most important thing you can do is listen to them. Help them to express what they are going through and feeling. Sometimes just talking about it will help to alleviate the feelings of chaos that they are experiencing.

Finally, make sure that the child knows that you love them and that you aren't going anywhere. Make a long-term commitment to helping the child, and stick with it!

### Causes of Chaos:

- Loss of a parent
- New homes
- New schools
- Less money
- Loss of friends
- New church
- Lack of rules
- Loss of routines
- Increased responsibility
- Lack of information
- Two sets of rules
- Loss of rituals
- Loss of identity
- Loss of predictability
- Lack of consistency
- Arguing parents
- Differing expectations
- Lack of planning
- Step Parents
- Step Siblings
- Half Siblings
- Changing parental figures



# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Confusion*

**CONFUSE:** to perplex or bewilder; to make unclear or indistinct.  
(from dictionary.com)



**Confused and Bewildered!!!** Divorce causes confusion in the lives of children. They wonder if their parents ever loved one another and, if not, whether that means that they never loved them either. The very source of their identity crumbles before their eyes, and the two people who defined their very existence oftentimes can no longer stand to be in the same room together. Roles change, homes change, schools change and routines change. The chaos that is the life of the child of divorce leads to confusion which can lead to despair. They are left wondering what went wrong and why it ever had to happen in the first place. Divorce leaves children confused and with nowhere to turn for answers.



### GETTING OFF TO A GOOD START

A lot of the confusion that kids ultimately feel about a divorce comes from a general lack of information. If you are getting a divorce, it is critical that you tell your kids in the best possible way to minimize their confusion. Here are some suggestions:

- ✓ Be certain that there is no chance of reconciliation before telling the kids.
- ✓ If at all possible, tell your kids together with your spouse and all at the same time.
- ✓ Discuss ahead of time with your spouse what and how you will tell the children.
- ✓ Be honest and forthright with your children. Do not try to dodge questions.
- ✓ Make sure your children understand that divorce is between a mom and dad and does not affect a parents' relationship with their children.
- ✓ Explain clearly why the divorce is happening (without using unnecessary or age inappropriate details) and make sure your children understand it is not their fault.
- ✓ Remain calm and avoid expressing feelings of anger, blame, guilt, etc.
- ✓ Encourage and answer any questions they might have.
- ✓ Be clear and specific about any changes that will happen in their lives.
- ✓ Respect their reactions and feelings when you break the news.
- ✓ Reassure children of your love and that it doesn't change because of the divorce.
- ✓ Give your children time to react and adjust to the news.

### RECONCILING TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

*"Panic and confusion often result when children are expected to adopt their parents' differing values and lifestyles." ([Explaining Divorce to Children](#), Joyce Shriner)*

Children from intact families rely on their parents to reconcile their differences and present a united front in raising the kids. That all changes when parents

get divorced. Children are left to work out the differences in parenting styles, rules, morals, expectations, consequences, and requirements. On top of all of the other changes going on in their lives, children of divorce must navigate the confusion of trying to reconcile their parents' now separate and different worlds.

#### Scripture References About Confusion

Ps. 23	Jn 8:31-32
Ps. 119:130	1 Cor 13:12
Prov. 20:24	2 Cor 4:8
Prov. 25:2	Phil. 4:8-9
Ecc. 11:5	2 Tm 2:7
Jer. 29:11	Heb 13:8
Luke 12:2	Jms. 1:5



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Denial*

**DENIAL:** disbelief in the existence or reality of a thing. *(from dictionary.com)*

### Scripture References for those in Denial

Ps. 119:50	Mt. 5:4
Ps. 119:76	Lk. 19:41
Ps. 147:3	Jn. 11:33-36
Ecc. 7:2-4	Ac. 20:37-38
Is. 43:2	Rom. 12:15
Is. 46:3-4	2 Cor 1:3-4
Jer. 29:11	Rev. 21:4

**DENIAL...AIN'T JUST A RIVER IN EGYPT!** When it comes to children of divorce, denial is a very real thing that many experience. Many children, most of whom are ill equipped to deal with the trauma and consequences of the decision of one or more of their parents, will turn to denial (either knowingly or unknowingly) as a coping mechanism.

Rather than face the prospect of an irreversibly changed world, children will just deny that there is a problem or falsely assume that their parents will be getting back together. Faced with the prospect of having their world torn in two, children will choose to “pretend” that nothing has changed. Prolonged denial can be dangerous for children of divorce because it does not afford them the opportunity to talk about, and deal with, the emotions they are facing.



### WHY DENIAL CAN BE A GOOD THING

According to the article “Denial: When it Helps, When it Hurts” the Mayo clinic staff explains (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/denial/SR00043>),

*“Refusing to face facts might seem blatantly unhealthy. Sometimes, though, a short period of denial can be helpful. Being in denial gives your mind the opportunity to unconsciously absorb shocking or distressing information at a pace that won't send you into a psychological tailspin...When faced with an overwhelming turn of events, it's OK to say, “I just can't think about all of this right now.” You might need time to work through what's happened and adapt to new circumstances. But it's important to realize that denial should only be a temporary measure — it won't change the reality of the situation.”*

Before rushing to force a child to “accept reality” and deal with their denial, it is prudent to step back and ask yourself if they just need some time to adjust to the new situation. However, if the denial persists, then some form of intervention might be warranted.

### DENIAL IS PART OF GRIEVING

Children experiencing the divorce of their parents will generally experience all the stages of grief. Those stages include:

- ✓ Denial
- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Bargaining
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Acceptance

For children of divorce, they often experience these stages over and over again as they leave one parent to be with another and at each stage of live. The best thing you can do for a child going through these stages is to be there to listen and lend an empathetic ear. The grieving process itself, while painful, helps the child to process what is going on in their lives.



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## A GUIDE TO DEALING WITH DEPRESSION



### Scripture References About Depression

Dt. 31:8	Ps. 147:3
Ps. 3:3	Is 41:10
Ps. 23	Is 43:2
Ps. 34:17	Jer. 29:11
Ps. 37:3-4	Jn. 16:33
Ps. 37:23-24	Rm. 8:38-39
Ps. 40:1-3	Ph. 4:13
Ps. 42:11	2 Tm. 1:7
Ps. 46:10	1 Pt. 5:6-7

Depression often masks itself as:

Anger  
Clinginess  
Exaggerated Stories  
Failing Grades  
Lying  
Negativity  
Rebellion  
Regression  
Resentment

**DEPRESSION...A PAINFUL BUT NECESSARY PART OF GRIEF!** In the words of Dr. Archibald Hart, "At the time of their parents' divorce, nearly all children of depressed to some degree." While the extent of the depression differs, most children of divorce experience what is called "reactive depression." Reactive depression is a response to a severe loss of threat of loss – in this case the loss of their intact family along with the multitude of other losses that befall the child of divorce. Reactive depression is less severe than depression caused by biochemical reactions. Many adults fear depression because they do not understand it. This fear prevents them from helping children of divorce to navigate this often painful but absolutely necessary stage in the grieving process following divorce.

### SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

- Sadness or unhappiness
- Physically and psychologically "slowed down"
- Loss of interest in normal activities
- Complaints of physical aches and pains (headaches, insomnia, etc.)
- Experiencing a loss of appetite or a preoccupation with food along with overeating
- A feeling of discontentment and inability to find pleasure
- Complaints that "nobody cares"
- Frustration which is reflected in irritability, short temperedness, or extreme sensitivity
- Engaging in self-rejecting talk

### HELPING A CHILD COPE WITH DEPRESSION

- ✓ See the loss from the child's point of view
- ✓ Don't minimize or make light of the loss
- ✓ Accept the depression as a normal reaction to the divorce
- ✓ Help your child experience the depression as fully as possible to expedite grieving
- ✓ Be patient and give the child space
- ✓ Allow the child freedom to feel
- ✓ Avoid perpetuating the depression by punishment or anger
- ✓ Provide the child with reassurance and accurate information
- ✓ Help your child to accept the reality of the loss
- ✓ Allow the child to talk about the loss and relive good times from before the divorce
- ✓ Pray with them

**DEPRESSION:** a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal; sadness greater and more prolonged than that warranted by any objective reason. (from dictionary.com)

*"At the outset, let me make this very important point: **We are designed to experience reactive depression.** It is not an accident, and we are not failures because we get sad. It is the way God has designed us to deal with life's losses...Reactive depression is all about grieving. It is the depression that helps us come to terms with our loss. Reactive depression ... is the normal response we are all designed to experience when we have something we prize wrenched from us. Think about it for a moment. This is exactly what every child of divorce is experiencing-the loss of what he or she prizes above everything else: a united family and both parents who live at home." Dr. Archibald D. Hart Helping Children Survive Divorce: What to Expect; How to Help*



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Thanks to Dr. Archibald Hart whose book Helping Children Survive Divorce was a valuable resource in compiling this resource

# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Embarrassment*

**EMBARRASS:** to cause confusion & shame to; make uncomfortably self-conscious; disconcert; abash. (from dictionary.com)



**KIDS EMBARRASSED BY THEIR PARENS?...SAY WHAT?** We know what you're thinking. Kids have been embarrassed by their parents throughout history. That fact is, it's almost a right of passage in our culture. But, imagine if you will, what it would be like to experience something so devastating to your life that it changes your very core being and at the same time feeling like you can't talk to anyone about it because it's embarrassing. Many children who experience the divorce of their parents feel shame and embarrassment. Countless kids never share the fact that their parents are divorced even with their closest friends. Schoolmates are not invited over after school for fear that they may raise questions about why there aren't any pictures of dad on the wall or where mom is. Despite how common divorce has become in our culture, many kids still feel shame and embarrassment when it comes to discussing the fact that their family has fallen apart. On top of everything else going on in their lives, they live in fear that the "secret" of their family may be found out.

### WHO I AM IN CHRIST?

Embarrassment often results from a wrong understanding of who we are. When we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our life, he begins to change us from the inside out. When we know who we are in Christ, we have no need to be embarrassed. In Christ, I am:

- ✓ A Child of God (John 1:12)
- ✓ God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)
- ✓ Chosen by God (Ephesians 1:4)
- ✓ One with Christ (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- ✓ Complete (Colossians 2:10)
- ✓ Eternally loved (1 Peter 1:5)
- ✓ A citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20)
- ✓ Chosen by God (Ephesians 1:4)
- ✓ Chosen and adopted by God (Ephesians 1:3-8)
- ✓ Redeemed and Forgiveness (Colossians 1:13-14)
- ✓ Complete (Colossians 2:9-10)
- ✓ Free from condemnation (Romans 8:31-39)
- ✓ Able to do all things through Him (Philippians 4:13)
- ✓ A friend of God (James 2:23)

### **Scripture References About Embarrassment**

Gen. 2:25	Rm. 1:16
Dt. 26:11	Rm. 10:11
Ps. 127:3-5	2 Cor 5:17
Pr. 11:29	2 Cor 6:18
Pr. 19:26	2 Cor 10:4-5
Is. 40:29-31	Phil. 3:13
Is. 43:18	Phil. 4:8
Jer. 17:9	Hb. 12:2
Zeph. 3:17	1 Pt. 4:16

### Easing Embarrassment

The root of much embarrassment in children of divorce is the feeling that they are the only ones who have ever been through this. Because embarrassed children are unwilling to talk to others about what is going on, they do not realize that there are others, many others, who are going, or have gone, through the same thing. Find a support group where kids can share with other children who are going through the same thing. Knowing other people are having similar experiences does not ease all the pain of divorce, but it does help with feelings of embarrassment and gives the child someone to talk to who has a better chance of understanding because of their personal experience. When it comes to embarrassment, then, there is comfort in numbers.



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Fear*

**FEAR:** a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined. (from dictionary.com)

**FEAR...A LIFE OF WORRY!** In the midst of constant change, children of divorce often find themselves struggling with fear. Dr. Archibald Hart explains, "...it seem that no matter how open or hidden the conflict is, the final announcement of a separation or divorce is nearly always a surprise to the children. Their first emotional reaction is, therefore, one of panic, fear, and anxiety. What causes these feelings? Suddenly a cavernous unknown is opened up in front of the child, and he or she is being pushed into it! Divorce is a threat to the child's very existence as he or she knows it, an unsettling of everything stable and certain in life. It is an emotional earthquake of the highest magnitude and shakes the very foundations of security." (Dr. Archibald Hart, *Helping Children Survive Divorce*, 1996, Thomas Nelson)



### Scripture References About Fear

Dt. 3:22	Pr. 29:25
Js. 1:9	Is. 51:12
Ps. 23:4	Zeph. 3:17
Ps. 27:1	Mt. 10:31
Ps. 34:4	Mk. 5:36
Ps. 34:7	Jn. 14:27
Ps. 56:3	Rom. 8:38
Ps. 91:4-8	2 Tim 1:7
Ps. 103:13	1 Jn. 4:18
Ps. 112:7	Rev. 1:17

### Advice for Parents:

- Answer all questions
- Tell kids why you're getting divorced
- Assure kids they are safe
- Don't tell you child about your own fears and anxieties

### TYPES OF FEARS IN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

- ❖ Fear of the unknown
- ❖ Fear for their stuff
- ❖ Fear of change
- ❖ Fear of abandonment
- ❖ Fear that if their parents stopped loving one another that they will stop loving them too
- ❖ Worry about who will take care of them
- ❖ Fear of the future
- ❖ Fear of embarrassment
- ❖ Fear from a less stable environment
- ❖ Fear of being forgotten or alone
- ❖ Fear of new relationships

### HELPING CHILDREN OF DIVORCE DEAL WITH FEAR

- Find out what's bothering them
- Don't ever deny their fears
- Offer quiet reassurance
- Assure them that they are safe
- Provide physical reassurance (especially with young children)
- Give extra time and attention to the child
- Be patient (you may have to deal with the same fears over and over)
- Create a stable and unchanging environment
- Be predictable
- Don't overpromise
- Provide appropriate outlets to express their fear

### PHYSICAL INDICATORS OF FEAR

- |                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| • Stomach Aches | • Nail biting      |
| • Nausea        | • Nervous habits   |
| • Vomiting      | • Sweating         |
| • Diarrhea      | • Nightmares       |
| • Head aches    | • Trouble Sleeping |
| • Asthma        | • Clinginess       |
| • Allergies     |                    |

### Information is Key

Children of divorce need as much information as possible. The biggest fears are born out of the unknown, and children of divorce left to their own imaginations will come up with possibilities and outcomes which far worse than reality. A child who knows exactly what is going on will be in a much better position to deal with and overcome their fears.



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Grief*

### THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

1. **DENIAL** (Children are convinced that their parents will change their minds and reunite.)
2. **ANGER** (Kids want to blame someone for the divorce and may blame one parent, siblings, themselves or may just be angry at the world.)
3. **BARGAINING** (Children try to exert some control by bargaining with parents to stay together.)
4. **DEPRESSION** (Kids experience a great sense of sadness and loss. In this stage they come to the realization that nothing will stop the divorce.)
5. **ACCEPTANCE** (This stage does not equate to happiness, but kids begin to move past the feeling of loss.)

### A Recurring Process

Unlike grieving the loss of a loved one, the grief over divorce tends to reoccur in children of divorce as:

1. They enter the different stages of development and life.
2. They move back and forth between homes reminding them of the loss of their intact family.
3. They experience events like birthdays, graduations and weddings that temporarily bring their parents back together.

**GRIEF...A HEALING PROCESS.** The first reaction of most children of divorce upon hearing that their parents are going to split is one of shock. Ultimately though, children will find themselves embroiled in a grieving process similar to one they might experience when a parent dies. However, it is important to remember that the grieving process for children of divorce, while similar in terms of stages and reactions, can also be markedly different from the grieving associated with death. Unlike with death, the grief support structure often dissolves as children navigate the grief associated with their parents' divorce. Unlike death, other people do not generally share in, or understand the grief associated with divorce, and many are afraid to say anything or get involved for fear of making the situation worse. While grief is not a pleasant road to travel, it is a necessary and critical step in the healing process.

### A TREASURY OF PSALMS

The God of the Bible is a God of comfort! The Bible itself is full of comforting verses for those experiencing grief, and many of those verses are listed in the scripture section to the left. However, the Psalms particularly are chocked full of verses relevant and comforting for those experiencing any kind of grief and can be shared with children of divorce as they process the grief that comes with their parents' divorce. These Psalms will serve to remind children of the truth of God as revealed in His Word:

✓ Ps. 9:9	✓ Ps. 34:18-19	✓ Ps. 73:26
✓ Ps. 18:1-5	✓ Ps. 38:8-15	✓ Ps. 116:5-6
✓ Ps. 18:28	✓ Ps. 46:1-11	✓ Ps. 118:1-14
✓ Ps. 23:1-6	✓ Ps. 56:8	✓ Ps. 119:50
✓ Ps. 30:2-5	✓ Ps. 62:11	✓ Ps. 142:2
✓ Ps. 31:9-10	✓ Ps. 72:12	✓ Ps. 147:3

### HOW TO HELP A CHILD WITH GRIEF

- ✓ Give them someone to talk to
- ✓ Don't be afraid to talk about the loss
- ✓ Help them find words for their feelings
- ✓ Allow them to be honest with you
- ✓ Listen to them
- ✓ Don't force the conversation
- ✓ Be patient with them
- ✓ Be prepared to share with them over and over
- ✓ Try to understand what the child is thinking and going through
- ✓ Be a good role model
- ✓ Keep your own emotions in check
- ✓ Watch for behavior changes
- ✓ Pray for them
- ✓ Consider counseling/therapy if necessary

**GRIEF:** keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss; sharp sorrow; painful regret.. (from dictionary.com)

### Scripture References About Grief

Is. 26:3	Jn. 14:1
Is. 41:10	Jn. 14:18
Is. 43:2	Jn. 14:27
Is. 46:9-10	Jn. 16:33
Is. 49:13	Rom. 8:18
Is. 53:4	2 Cor. 1:3-4
Jer. 31:13	2 Th. 2:16-17
Lm. 3:31-33	Heb. 4:16
Mt. 5:4	1 Pt. 5:6-7
Mt. 11:28	Rev. 21:4
Lk. 6:21	



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Guilt*

**GUILT...A CONSISTENT EMOTION!** The more you study children of divorce, and the more you talk to them one-on-one, the more you will find out that there is one emotion which virtually every child of divorce deals with at some point or another in processing their parents' divorce. That emotion is guilt! Almost without fail, children of divorce will tell you that, "I felt responsible for my parents divorce." Some children blame one parent or both. Some kids blame their circumstances. Some kids will even blame their brothers or sisters. Eventually though, most children of divorce blame themselves. It can be as simple as "If I hadn't fought with my brother," or as complex as, "I don't feel like I did enough to stop it," but these kids wrestle not only with the divorce itself but with an ingrained feeling that they were somehow responsible for it in the first place.

**GUILT:** a feeling of responsibility or remorse for some offense, crime, wrong, etc., whether real or imagined. (*dictionary.com*)

### Scripture References About Guilt

Ps 46:1	2 Cor 5:17
Ps 51:10	2 Cor 5:21
Ps 103:12	Phil 3:13-14
Is 43:25	Col 3:13
Jon 2:2	Heb 4:16
Rom 5:11	Heb 8:12-13
Rom 8:1	Heb 9:14

### Is It My Fault?

### HELPING A CHILD WITH FEELINGS OF GUILT

- ✓ Talk to them.
- ✓ Pray with them.
- ✓ Give them an opportunity to express what they are feeling.
- ✓ Encourage them to be specific about what they think they did.
- ✓ Repeatedly assure them that they are not to blame for their parents' divorce.
- ✓ Find out what they think about the divorce.
- ✓ Help them to make sense of the divorce.
- ✓ Don't shut a child down when they are searching for answers.
- ✓ Don't tell them not to feel guilty – it doesn't help and may lead to even deeper feelings of guilt.

### Why Children Think It's Their Fault

Younger children are very self-centered. The average preschooler believes that the world revolves around them and everything that happens in the world is the result of something they do. It is part of their maturing process. Accordingly, when their parents get divorced, they naturally conclude that it must have been the result of something they have done.

We condition our kids to assume that things are their fault. As they grow, we teach them by pointing out their mistakes and the consequences of those mistakes. Children learn by being told "no," and so when something bad happens, they have been trained to know that it is their fault.

Finally, many kids find it hard to blame their parents because their parents are "always right." Instead, they turn the blame on themselves and feel guilty.

### INSIDE THE MIND OF A CHILD OF DIVORCE

- "If only I hadn't fought so much with my brother..."
- "If only I had kept my room clean..."
- "If only I hadn't made Mom mad that one time..."
- "If only I had been quiet when Dad was having a bad day..."
- "If only I had gotten better grades in school..."
- "If only I had behaved better..."
- "If only I had never been born..."



# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Loneliness*

**LONELINESS:** affected with, characterized by, or causing a depressing feeling of being alone.  
(from dictionary.com)

### Scripture References About Loneliness

Gen 28:15	Jn 14:18
Dt 31:6-8	Jn 15:15
Ps 34:18	Jn 16:32
Ps 62:1	Rom 15:4
Ps 72:12	1 Cor 1:9
Pr 18:24	Heb 13:5
Is 54:10	Jm 4:4



**LONELINESS...ONE IS THE LONELIEST NUMBER THAT YOU'LL EVER KNOW!** If there is one thing that marks almost all children of divorce, it is a feeling of loneliness following the divorce of their parents. Numerous studies indicate that children of divorce experience loneliness significantly more than children from intact families. As parents become more and more focused on what is going on in their own lives, children are often left to "fend for themselves." As families are forced to move following divorces, children of divorce change schools and neighborhoods, and quite often, the friends they have grown up with. As courts decide arbitrary custody arrangements, children lose access to grandparents and other extended families. The sum total of all it is an overwhelming sense of being alone.

### What Can You Do

- ✓ Be available to talk
- ✓ Encourage them to talk about how they feel
- ✓ Assure the child that you will be there
- ✓ Spend time with the child
- ✓ Give them space to be alone when needed (don't be aggressive)
- ✓ Spend time with them
- ✓ Encourage them to reach out and serve others
- ✓ Get them engaged in physical activity

### SYMPTOMS OF LONELINESS

*Many times, loneliness manifests itself in what might otherwise seem unrelated. If a child exhibits any of the following characteristics, consider whether or not the root cause might be that the child feels all alone.*

- Unusual demands for attention from parents and others
- Constantly smiling to try keep the peace between their parents
- Withdrawal from family and friends / Spending lots of time alone
- Anger or acting out in order to gain attention
- Getting in fights or excessive arguments
- Excessive clowning around or goofing off
- Denial of reality or nostalgia for the "good old days"
- A need to overachieve to gain acceptance

### A NOTE FOR NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS

A 2009 study \* found the level of loneliness in children of divorce does not decrease with an increase in visitation with the noncustodial parent.

*"If there is any single experience the unites children of divorce it is our feeling of loneliness as children. One of the most striking and far-reaching findings of the national survey is that just over a tenth of young people from intact families can identify with the experience 'I was alone a lot as a child,' whereas close to half of us from divorced families can. That's an extraordinary threefold difference." Elizabeth Marquardt Between Two Worlds*



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\* SOURCE: Civitci, Civitci, Asim, and Fiyakali, "Loneliness and Life Satisfaction in Adolescents with Divorced and Non-Divorced Parents." Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice 9, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 513-525.

# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Loss*

**LOSS:** the state of being deprived of or of being without something that one has had.  
(from dictionary.com)

**LOSS:** Divorce is a time a great loss for the child of divorce. In addition to losing at least one parent full-time, they experience a multitude of other losses. This sense of loss can follow a child of divorce through their entire life and affect their future relationships. Some studies have shown that the divorce of ones' parents can be as stressful, if not more stressful, than the death of ones' parents. With the death of a parent, the child does not view it as a choice. Whereas, in a divorce, the child will realize that at least one

parent had the choice to leave. In many ways this makes the loss seem more real and hurt more deeply. Furthermore, that loss tends to stick with the child and affect their decisions and relationships well into adulthood as they approach life through a lens tainted by the constant fear of loss. Unfortunately, our society tends to be a grief-avoiding culture where, rather than deal with the sense of loss created by the divorce, kids are shielded from the grieving process and never work through their emotions.

### Scripture References About Loss

Ps 9:9	Nah 1:7
Ps 18:2	Mt 5:4
Ps 23	Mt 6:19-34
Ps 30:5	Mt 11:25-30
Ps 34:18	Jn 14:1-4
Ps 46:1-2	Jn 14:27
Ps 55:22	Rm 8:31-39
Ps 71:20-21	Php 4:6
Lam 3:22-23	1 Pt 5:6-7
Lam 3:31-32	Rev 21:4



### A WHOLE LOT OF LOSS

*Children of Divorce experience a wide variety of losses. Not all children of divorce will experience all of these losses, but losses can include:*

- Loss of the parent not living in the home
- Loss of extended family including grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles and others
- Loss of friends and school
- Loss of parental support
- Loss of family history and traditions
- Loss of childhood
- Loss of an intact family
- Loss of a familiar way of life and daily routines
- Loss of easy access to both parents
- Loss of economic security
- Loss of a house and community
- Loss of familiarity and favorite places
- Loss of support in handling emotions and growing up
- Loss of security

### HELPING A CHILD WITH LOSS

- ✓ Give them someone to talk to.
- ✓ Reassure them that their parents' inability to stay together wasn't their fault.
- ✓ Reassure them that they are lovable.
- ✓ Reassure them that they are loved by you and by our Heavenly Father.
- ✓ Help them to establish new rituals & routines.
- ✓ Give them time to be kids.
- ✓ Give them choices to give them control over something in their lives.

### THE SPIRITUAL IMPACT OF LOSS

The loss of a parent (actual or perceived), particularly the loss of a father, can have a devastating and lasting impact on the spiritual development of a child. Archibald Hart writes about the experience of children of divorce in his book Growing Up Divorce, "When adults hear the words, "Heavenly Father" only scenes of desertion and loss come to their minds. They don't think of God as a Father image. One lady said "Just hearing, 'Our Father' would make a knot tighten up in my stomach."



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Being Powerless*



**POWERLESS....WHAT CAN I DO?** Children of Divorce did not choose to be in the position they find themselves in. Rather, their parent(s) made a decision which fundamentally impacts every day of their lives, for the rest of their lives. It is no wonder then that children of divorce seem powerless. No matter how much they long for reconciliation, they are powerless to make it happen. No matter how badly they want to stay in the same house, they are powerless to make it happen. They do not, for the most part, get to choose who they will spend time with and when. They do not get to choose what school to go to. They feel powerless – powerless to change anything, powerless over their own safety and powerless over their future. Many children of divorce will act out in anger and behavioral problems because in their disobedience, they regain a small sense of control over their surroundings.

**POWERLESS:** lacking power to act; helpless.  
(from dictionary.com)

### Scripture References About Powerlessness

2 Chr 20:12	Ps 84:5
Ps 6:9-10	Ps 84:10
Ps 18:1-3	Ps 142:1-7
Ps 18:17	Mt 9:36
Ps 31:9-10	Rm 5:6
Ps 71:20-21	Rm 8:26
Ps 72:12-13	Ph 4:6-7

### HOW POWERLESSNESS LEADS TO ANGER AND ACTING OUT

For children of divorce, who feel powerless to impact the world around them, they are often left with very little which is in their control. Imagine yourself as a child of divorce whose parents have told you that the family you grew up in is done, you'll now be living in two homes and experiencing a multitude of changes. There is nothing you can do about it. One of the things that no one can take away from you is your anger. Sometimes children of divorce will display their anger inappropriately because they view it as the one thing they still have some control over. Furthermore, many children will act out and misbehave because it gives them a sense of control over whatever environment they find themselves in. In these situations, it is important to be firm but not to engage in a power struggle with the child. By engaging in a power struggle you reaffirm the control the child is seeking. Instead, endeavor to give the child a sense of control over their own life by giving them choices

### Giving Children Power Through Choices

One of the best things you can do to help children of divorce to regain a sense of power over their own lives is to give them choices. Here are some examples of choices you can give kids:

- ✓ Allow children to choose which activities they will engage in.
- ✓ Give a child a choice about how they will help with the running of your ministry or which chores they complete at a home.
- ✓ Choices can be simple like where they would like to sit.
- ✓ When a child acts out, give them a choice of calming down and remaining part of the group or removing themselves to calm down.
- ✓ Allow them to choose when to share and when to remain quiet.

*Anger is not the only reaction of children at this age. They are also sad about the breakup, afraid of what is going to happen, and lonely. In particular, these children feel powerless. They do not want the divorce, miss their intact families, long for the noncustodial parent, and feel helpless to alter the tremendous changes occurring in their lives."*

Kevin Seiji Shinoda *Children of Divorce: The Impact on Classroom Behavior*



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Sadness*

**SAD:** affected by unhappiness or grief; sorrowful or mournful.  
(from dictionary.com)



**THERE'LL BE SAD SONGS....TO MAKE YOU CRY!!!** As parents, one of the things we hate the most is to see our kids sad. We will do all that we can to make keep our kids from being sad and to cheer them up when they are sad. Unfortunately, when it comes to divorce, sadness is a fact of life. As the child losses the life they have become accustomed to (often the only life they have ever known) they are frequently overcome with a deep and lasting sense of sadness. Indeed, sadness is generally one of the very first emotions you will encounter when a child is told his/her parents are separating or divorcing. Children are often left wanting to blame someone for the sadness they are feeling, and parents and siblings frequently become the targets of that blame. Many times sadness will lead a child to blame themselves leading to feelings of guilt. Many children will feel like they should be sad and feel additional guilt when they do experience those momentary periods of happiness. Many children will also seek to mask their sadness, particularly from parents, so as not to further burden the adults in their lives.

### SYMPTOMS OF SADNESS

- Crying/Tears
- Loneliness
- Ignoring past hobbies
- Periods of longing
- Attempting to hold in emotions
- Fatigue
- Poor decision making
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in eating habits
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Passivity
- Hopelessness
- More demanding

### HELPING A SAD CHILD

- ✓ Provide safe havens and places for the child to retreat.
- ✓ Address the sadness. This emotion will not fade on its own. It must be dealt with.
- ✓ Let children know that it is ok to be sad.
- ✓ Comment on a child's sadness and help them put words to their feelings.
- ✓ Encourage them not to be embarrassed about being sad.
- ✓ Explain to children that their sadness won't fix their family.
- ✓ Let children know that they will feel happy again in the future.
- ✓ Let them cry if they need to.

### **Scripture References About Sadness**

Ps 9:9	Is 25:8
Ps 22:24	Is 54:10
Ps 27:4-5	Lm 3:31-33
Ps 30:5	Nah 1:7
Ps 34:18	Mt 5:4
Ps 37:39	Mt 11:25-30
Ps 46:1-2	Jn 14:27
Ps 55:22	2 Cor 1:3-5
Ps 71:20-21	Ph 4:6
Ps 73:26	Hb 4:14-16
Ps 138:7	1 Pt 5:6-7
Pr 14:32	Rev 21:4

### A FAMILY NO MORE

*The following poem was written by an 11 year old boy in a Divorce Care 4 Kids program expressing some of the sadness kids feel when their parents divorce:*

It was very sad when my  
dad said divorce  
My voice started to  
get coarse  
I was only six  
It hit me like bricks  
My sister was four  
When he walked out  
the door  
I did not understand  
He said goodbye  
I started to cry  
After the talk  
He gave us the walk  
My mom gave me a hug  
I felt like a squashed bug  
I felt like nothing  
Not even something  
It had to be a joke  
I felt like I broke  
I burst into tears  
I had so many fears  
Then it came to a halt  
For it was not my fault  
We are one less family to say  
"So let us pray"

Originally included in an article  
by Linda Ranson Jacobs at  
<http://www.hlp4.com/node/69>



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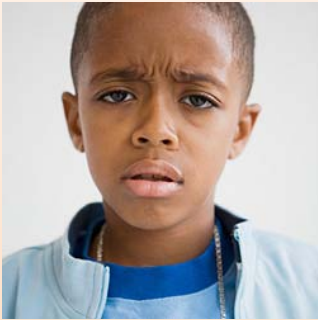
<http://DivorceMinistry4Kids.com>



# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Shock*

**SHOCK:** a sudden or violent disturbance of the mind, emotions, or sensibilities. (from dictionary.com)



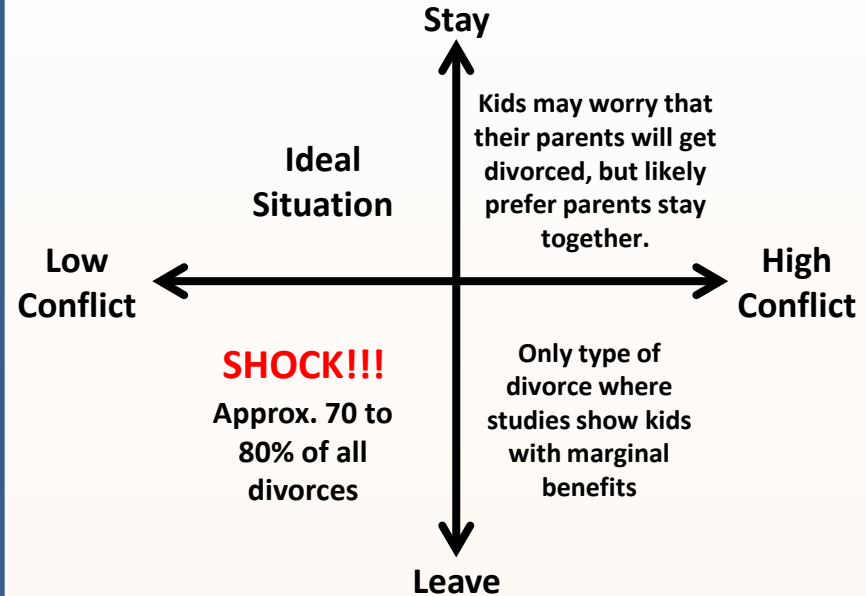
### Scripture References About Shock

Js 1:9	Is 40:31
Ps 30:5	Is 41:10
Ps 34:4	Jn 16:33
Ps 34:19	Lk 1:37
Ps 46:1	Rm 5:3-4
Ps 143:8	Phil 4:13
Pr 3:5-6	1 Pt 5:7

**SHOCKED AND CONFUSED...**Many children of divorce live in a constant state of shock and confusion. Somewhere around ¾ of all divorces are classified as coming from low-conflict marriages. The children in these homes do not see the divorce coming. They are largely unaware that one or both of their parents are unhappy, and the news of the divorce comes as a total surprise. Many of these children will show signs of anger and denial as they wrestle through the shock of the news.

Even those children who do process their parents' divorce and seem to be adjusting fairly well will be shocked as their parents begin to date and see other people. It is not natural to the child to see Mom or Dad with anyone other than their other parent, and this can take a lot of getting used. Furthermore, remarriages, Step-families, and half-siblings can all leave the child of divorced feeling dazed and confused. The emotional aftershocks of divorce carry on well later in life for these kids.

### THE DIVORCE/CONFLICT MATRIX



*This matrix reflects the impact on kids of divorce vs. staying together based upon the type of relationship between the parents prior to the divorce. A high conflict marriage includes loud and consistent fighting and/or abuse. In the majority of divorces, the parents are defined as low conflict. As a result, the kids don't see the divorce coming and are shocked by the news of the split.*

*"The third category, Cochrane points out, is the one most parents overlook because they want to believe that their kids are coping just fine with the divorce. 'Shannon is a good example of the kind of child who doesn't ask a lot of questions, get upset, or act up during and immediately after the divorce,' says Cochrane. 'However, children like Shannon are probably in shock or denial: they don't know what to say, so they don't say anything. These kids have a longer, slower-burning fuse than kids who act up, and eventually -- whether it's a year or five years -- their fuse will blow.'" Teri Morrison in Are Your Kids At Risk?*



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Stress*

**STRESS:** constraining force or influence: as a physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. (from merriam-webster.com)

**STRESS...SO MUCH FOR THE INNOCENCE OF YOUTH!** The world of a child of divorce is marked by stress. Studies show that children of divorce have higher stress levels than their friends in intact families. In fact, studies show that the divorce of one's parents is the second most stressful thing a child can experience (second only to death of a parent). In a day and age where children are already stressed out, divorce exacerbates the stress which children already experience and adds its own set of stressors. Children are faced with the stress of living in two different homes, changing schools, the loss of extended family members, economic turmoil and constant worry about whether or not even basic needs will be met. This stress can be further intensified by well-meaning adults who seek to shelter children from the effects of the grieving process. This effort can confuse the child as they wrestle with their grief and cause additional stress. This stress leads to physical ailments, poor academic performance and, in some cases, suicide and often lasts well into adulthood.

"Children's view of divorce is unambiguous: it's a disaster. In 1988, professor Jeanne Disel-Lewis surveyed almost 700 junior high school students, asking them to rate a number of life events in terms of stressfulness. The only thing students ranked as more stressful than parental divorce was death of a parent or close family member. Parental divorce received a higher rating than the death of a friend, being "physically hit" by a parent, feeling that no one liked them, or being seriously injured." Karl Zinsmeister Divorce Harms Children

### CAUSES OF STRESS AFTER DIVORCE

- Less consistent parenting
- Economic changes
- Withdrawal of a parent from the child's life
- Family transitions including remarriage & cohabitation
- Dealing with family events where both parents will be attending
- Uncertainty about basic needs
- Exposure to continued conflict between parents
- Changing homes and schools
- Parental depression
- Changing relationships with friends and extended family members

### SIGNS OF STRESS IN A CHILD

- ✓ Crying
- ✓ Problems sleeping
- ✓ Gastrointestinal problems
- ✓ Nightmares
- ✓ Aggression
- ✓ Clinginess
- ✓ Moodiness
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ Fussiness
- ✓ Problems gaining weight
- ✓ Excessive weight gain
- ✓ Developmental delays
- ✓ Regression
- ✓ Changes in eating habits
- ✓ Withdrawal



### Scripture References About Stress

Ps 34:10	Mt 6:25-34
Ps 37:5	Mt 11:28-30
Ps 37:25	Jn 14:27
Ps 55:2	Jn 16:33
Ps 103:1-5	Rm 8:6
Pr 16:3	Rm 8:37
Is 40:28-31	Rm 16:20
Is 55:1-3	1 Cor 3:11
Jer 17:7	Gal 6:9
Jer 29:11	Ph 4:6-9
Hb 3:17-19	1 Pt 5:6-7
Mal 4:2	1 Jn 4:4



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Being Torn*

**TEAR:** to pull apart or in pieces by force, especially so as to leave ragged or irregular edges.  
(from dictionary.com)

**TORN IN TWO!** When parents divorce, children are put in a position where they are forced to split their time between two houses. Whether it is one week here and one week there or every other weekend at dad's house, children go from having one cohesive family unit to trying to find a way to exist in two, oftentimes very different, worlds. They go from being a member of one family to living in two homes, from having one set of clothes and toys to having two, from having one calendar to keep track of to two. No matter where they are, they are always missing either their mother or their father. Suddenly, they are forced to be two very different people at two different houses.



### WHY CHILDREN FEEL TORN

- ✓ Family torn apart (two homes)
- ✓ Loss of rituals and routines
- ✓ Loss of shared history with parents
- ✓ Always missing at least one parent
- ✓ Not fully part of either family
- ✓ Always missing events at the "other house"
- ✓ Feel like both an insider and outsider in both houses

### Scripture References About Being Torn

Gen 50:20	Rm 8:28-29
Dt 31:8	2 Cor 1:3-5
Ps 31:9	Phil 1:21-23
Is 25:8	Phil 4:6-7
Is 33:6	Jm 1:2-4
Is 66:13	Rev 7:17
Jn 14:3	Rev 21:4

### RECONCILING THEIR PARENTS' WORLDVIEWS

When people get married, one thing they have to do is figure out how to reconcile their worldviews. Whether they differ over religion or how to discipline the kids, parents have to discuss, compromise and come to a united decision. Once they get divorced, this daunting task falls to the kids. They are left to figure out how to live with two different sets of rules and expectations in two worlds they never asked for and never would have chosen for themselves.

*"Our parents may no longer have been in conflict, but the conflict between their worlds was still alive. Yet instead of being in the open, visible to outsiders, the conflict between their worlds migrated and took root in us." Elizabeth Marquardt Between Two Worlds*



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Vulnerability*

**VULNERABLE:** capable of or susceptible to being wounded or hurt. (from dictionary.com)

**A VULNERABLE GENERATION...**Children of divorce are vulnerable. They are vulnerable emotionally, physically and spiritually. Emotionally they are vulnerable because of the overwhelming emotions which accompany the divorce of their parents. Physically they are vulnerable because they spend so much time alone and can become easy pray for predators. Spiritually they are vulnerable because the two people God put in their lives to reflect his love have called it quits, and they begin to question whether they can trust anyone or place their faith in anyone – including God. Children grow up looking to, and counting on, the adults in their life to create a safe and secure environment. In the face of divorce, they are left to fend for themselves. One of the most vulnerable times for a child of divorce comes as their parents begin to date and introduce new people into their lives, and often times into their homes.

*“Children are vulnerable after a divorce and – especially if there is a history of abuse, addiction, or mental illness in the family – they can be easy prey for abusers. As we’ve seen, children of divorce are left alone much more often than other children are. Many are too accessible to adults with bad intentions, especially to men who enter the home as a mother’s boyfriend or new husband.” Elizabeth Marquardt Between Two Worlds*

### Scripture References About Vulnerability

Ps 5:11-12 Ps 104:5  
Ps 9:9-10 Ps 118:8  
Ps 10:17 Pr 4:23  
Ps 18:2 Is 40:11  
Ps 31:24 Mt 6:21  
Ps 34:18 Jn 14:27  
Ps 40:2-3 Rm 8:31  
Ps 55:12 2 Cr 10:4-5  
Ps 61:2 Hb 6:19  
Ps 91:4 Hb 11:1  
Ps 94:18-19 1 Pt 5:7-9

### THE VULNERABILITIES OF THE CHILD OF DIVORCE

- ✓ Becoming a party to destructive parental battles.
- ✓ Lack of confidence and low self-esteem.
- ✓ Life-long vulnerability to the experience of loss.
- ✓ Emotional conflict.
- ✓ High levels of stress.
- ✓ Abuse and neglect.
- ✓ Feeling like they can be sent away from their home at any moment.

Type of Living Arrangement	Instances of Maltreatment per 1,000 Children	Risk Relative to Married Biological Parents
Parent With Cohabiting Partner	57.2	841.18%
Neither Parent	33.2	488.24%
Single Parent, No Partner	28.4	417.65%
Other Married Parents	24.4	358.82%
Cohabiting Biological Parents	23.5	345.59%
Married Biological Parents	6.8	100.00%

Source: Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



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# DEALING WITH THE EFFECTS OF DIVORCE ON KIDS

## *A Guide to Dealing With Feelings of Withdrawal*

**WITHDRAW:** to remove oneself from some activity, competition, etc. (from dictionary.com)

**WITHDRAWAL...A COMMON DEFENSE MECHANISM.** One thing that is common to the vast majority of children of divorce is that they wish things could go back to the way they were. They long for the time before that moment when mom and/or dad told them they were getting a divorce or, worse yet, just walked out without saying a word. Children react to this in a variety of ways. Some children get angry and begin to lash out at their parents, at siblings, at other authority figures or at the closest available person. Some children tend towards overachieving as a means of coping. Most children end up blaming themselves at some point another. Then there are children who cope with this news by simply withdrawing. They may withdraw physically by giving up close friends, cherished hobbies and physical activity. Or, they may simply withdraw emotionally – turning inside and masking any expression of the emotions eating them up from the inside out. Either way, it is important to engage the withdrawn child. Help them to express their emotions. Life will never be the same for these kids, but you can help them to return to things which were important to them prior to the divorce.

### **CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AND WITHDRAWAL**

Rather than face what is going on in their lives, many children of divorce will simply withdraw from the things which had previously been important to them including:

- Parents
- Friends
- Family Members
- Favorite Activities
- Hobbies
- School Activities
- Life in General

### **Scripture References About Withdrawal**

Ps 16:18	1 Cor 13:4-8
Ps 27:10	Gal 6:9
Pr 27:6	Phil 2:4
Is 49:15-16	Hb 10:24-25
Mt 7:12	1 Pt 4:8
Lk 14:25-27	1 Pt 5:7
Jn 15:13	1 Jn 1:7

### **ONE-ON-ONE TIME**

One of the best things you can do for a child who is showing signs of emotional or social withdrawal is to spend some time alone with that child. One-on-one time with the child will show him/her that they are important to you and “worth” your time. It will also provide you with an opportunity to engage them in a conversation about what they are feeling and going through.

### **SPENDING TIME ALONE VS. WITHDRAWAL**

There is value in spending time alone, and the child of divorce may relish time to just be by themselves and not deal with the chaos that has come into their lives. Jesus often took time to himself. However, if the child always wants to be alone or never chooses to engage with other children, that might be a sign of an issue. A child may no longer find joy in the same things as they grow and mature, but if they no longer enjoy any activities, that is a sign of a greater problem.

*Many children of divorce spend a lot of time by themselves. Unfortunately, this combined with the stress of divorce can lead to more extreme types of withdrawal. Consider the following finding from Elizabeth Marquardt in her book *Between Two Worlds*: “If there is any single experience the unites children of divorce it is our feeling of loneliness as children. One of the most striking and far-reaching findings of the national survey is that just over a tenth of young people from intact families can identify with the experience ‘I was alone a lot as a child,’ whereas close to half of us from divorced families can. That’s an extraordinary threefold difference.”*



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