

# **A Better Divorce Course**

## **A Guide for Divorcing Parents**

**By Beverly Dabrio and Maurice Martinez**

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## **Why Should I Take This Course?**

This course was designed for parents of children between 0 and 18. This book is useful for parents who are experiencing a divorce and/or separation. In addition, this guide includes a number of practical ideas for helping children whose parents are not divorced.

This guide focuses on the present and the future rather than the past. We acknowledge that what happened in the past cannot be forgotten or rewritten. However, we encourage parents to use their past experiences, both the negative and the positive ones, as a learning opportunity.

In this course you will also have an opportunity to explore and design future goals for you and your children. We have included ways to help you and your children attain these goals. The course promotes positive discipline. It discusses a variety of approaches toward discipline that help promote a positive self image in children.

We talk extensively about how children feel about divorce. We present techniques that will help you identify how your child/children are feeling about the divorce. The book also gives some practical suggestions on how you can help your child explore and express their feelings.

When one undergoes a major loss, he/she often experiences something known to the psychological community as the stages of loss and grief. The stages of loss and grief is a process that is often experienced after a person undergoes a major loss and being aware of this process will help you support your children before, during and after the divorce. The stages can also be useful in helping you to understand your own feelings because parents often experience them during a divorce. While the stages of loss and grief are experienced differently by each person, an awareness of specific stages will help you recognize them as they occur.

The course discusses legal issues such as mediation and child support. In addition, child visitation is discussed and a guide is included to aid parents in designing a parenting plan that serves the best interest of the child. Some definitions of legal terms that pertain to divorce are provided to help parents better understand the legal terminology used by the courts.

It is important to note, that this course is not designed for counseling purposes. This course does not replace the need for a professional mental health counselor. Parents are discouraged from discussing their specific case information during the course. If you are confused, or deeply saddened by the divorce and need help coping, we encourage you to seek the assistance of a mental health counselor, therapist, or psychologist.

Also, this course does not provide or constitute legal advice. From time to time you will come in contact with legal terminology and concepts. However, this will be general information about the course and is not meant to be applied to a specific legal situation. If you need clarification, and/or explanation of the legal process you will need to secure the services of an attorney. Please keep in mind that the information presented here is very general. Only an attorney can give you legal advice that will be specific to your unique situation.

## ***Disclaimer***

*“The components of the parenting course are intended for educational purposes only. The presentation of this material is not intended to constitute mental health therapy, give information on specific mental health disorders nor medications to treat mental health disorders. Participants are encouraged to discuss specific mental health questions with a licensed mental health therapist of their choice.”*

## **Protecting your Children’s Emotional Health during a Divorce**

In order to help children grow and flourish there are specific supports that parents can provide. Parents will need to provide lots of support for their children, during and after the divorce, to ensure that their needs are being met. Many times parents get caught up in the “divorce battle” to the extent that they forget what and who is important. The way in which parents conduct themselves, as well as relate to each other, will impact their child emotionally. Keeping these guidelines in mind could make the process easier for both you and your children.

Children need certain physical and emotional supports while experiencing a divorce. They need proper clothing, good nutrition, and a safe living environment. They should receive financial support from both parents. They will also need proper healthcare and health insurance. In addition, they need to understand that both of their parents love them and will continue to be their parents. Spending time with your children sends them the message that you care for them. Children will need the continued love and support of both parents.

It is important for parents to provide children with the best financial support that they can afford. On the most basic level this means that both parents must contribute towards child support and other financial costs. In other cases, this might mean additional financial support of children. While there are certain legal financial requirements discussed later in this guide, keep in mind that your child may need additional financial support. For example, a child who is attending college may need financial help after their eighteenth birthday. Likewise, a child with a disability may need continued financial support even as an adult.

In addition to physical and financial needs, children also have emotional needs. During a divorce parents may be caught up in emotional turmoil. Thus, it is not surprising that some parents forget that their child is also undergoing emotional struggles. Children who are experiencing a divorce may become very uncertain of their future. They may even ponder whether or not a parent still loves them. Parents must reassure them that their love will continue. Likewise, they need to be reassured that they are still a part of a family. Children need love and a sense of familiar belonging. A simple act like saying “I love you” can be significant.

Children should be treated as individuals and not as property. Children are not to be fought over like a car or a house. The question should never be: “Who gets the children?” Both parents should be involved in their child’s life. A child should feel free to love each parent and to feel loved by each parent. Children are not to be used as pawns in parents’ battles. In too many

divorces, children are used to try and hurt the other parent. During some separations, a parent will attempt to restrict or disrupt the time that their child spends with the other parent. In other cases, parents use children as spies to try to find out what is happening in the other parent's home.

Children should be treated as children during a divorce. They should not be asked to make adult decisions such as which parent's home they want to live in. Having to decide which parent to reside with could make a child feel as though he/she is being asked to "choose sides." Both parents are responsible for deciding where their child/children will reside. Likewise, the days of visitation should be decided by parents and shared with children.

Children should not replace the other parent or take on any parental responsibilities during or after the divorce. In, addition, children should not become their parent's best friend. Children should not have to provide emotional support for their parents. They should not be asked to comfort or counsel a parent. If you are feeling sad, your child may want to respond by trying to help you feel better. This is especially true if you cry or show other visible signs of sadness in front of your children. While crying in front of children for a few minutes is a normal display of emotion, being sad for hours at a time is not a healthy display of emotion. Crying for long periods of time in front of children may turn them towards wanting to comfort or counsel you during the divorce. Children should not have to become their parent's counselors. Therefore, if you find yourself in need of a counselor, seek professional help.

## **The Stages of Loss and Grief**

Many people experience a process of grieving when they suffer a major loss in life. A major loss can be considered to be the loss of a loved one, the loss of contact with one's family for long periods of time or a major loss of stability in one's life. When we examine divorce through the eyes of children, they often perceive the divorce as the loss of their family. For most children, the family is the primary stable force in their lives. It is stable and it is constant. It is the one thing that remains the same even when other things change. In the past, your child may have lost his/her favorite toy or may have been unable to continue playing a particular sport. Maybe your child has even had to change schools or move to a new, unfamiliar neighborhood, city or state. No matter what changes he/she has endured until this point in time, your child has had the family to rely on. Having to undergo a divorce communicates a different message to the child. Many children see the divorce as the loss of a major force that helped to provide stability in their lives. As a result, they begin to experience the stages of loss and grief.

Too often, children experience the stages of loss and grief without anyone to share their feelings with. As a parent, being aware of the stages of loss and grief will help you intervene in your children's lives to support them. The stages of loss and grief were presented by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and are a process in which your children experience five different phases. During these phases your children move from unwillingness to accept any of the realities of the divorce to full acceptance. It is important to note that even though many people experience the stages of loss and grief in order, some people do not. However, being aware of all five stages will help you support your children through the grieving process. At the end of this section there is a guide on how to help your children through the stages of loss and grief.

### **Stage 1-Denial**

Denial is an attempt to ignore the emotional effects of major losses. People do this by ignoring the facts, and telling themselves and others that the loss has not occurred. When it comes to divorce, a parent or child may enter a state of denial. A parent that did not anticipate that the other parent wanted a divorce may experience the stage of denial. They may refuse to believe that they are experiencing the first stages of a divorce and may refuse to engage in any conversation that pertains to the divorce. They may try to create situations that simulate happy family life to reinforce their idea that a divorce is taking place.

If it is possible for a parent to feel as though the divorce is not taking place, then imagine how your child feels when they find out about the divorce. Your child may completely reject the reality of the divorce. They may refuse to have a conversation with you about the divorce and might create fantasies to take the place of painful thoughts and feelings about the divorce. They may want to cling to parents, refuse to be alone and be unable to engage in activities with their friends.

### **Stage 2-Anger**

During this stage, individuals begin to become frustrated with the realities of the major loss. The environment created by the divorce may cause them to rebel in areas of their lives that they feel

as though they still control. The major loss created by the divorce may lead to denial and then anger and children who are angry may begin to behave in ways that they have not before.

When a child becomes angry he/she may act aggressively toward other children or throw things. He/she may complain that he/she is sick and begin to perform poorly in school. Your child may reject parental values and may even say things to try to upset or hurt you. While it will take much patience to get through this stage, there are some important suggestions at the end of this section on the stages of loss and grief.

### **Stage 3-Bargaining**

Individuals who are facing an important loss often engage in bargaining. They may try to make a physical or psychological deal in order to stop the pain they feel from the loss or to change things to the way that they used to be. In cases of divorce, children often think that they are the cause of the divorce. In many cases, they overhear an argument between their parents during which their name is mentioned in passing and they begin to associate themselves with the separation of their parents.

Once children find out that their parents are divorcing, they may think about a specific argument that their parents have had in the past. Perhaps, it was an argument about who would pay a particular bill or who would stay home from work with them when they were sick. It could have been something benign like who was going to cook dinner for the family one night, or who was going to drive to the park. Perhaps, the dinner happened to be the child's favorite dinner or the park, the child's favorite place to visit. Once your children know about the divorce, they may think about these arguments and focus upon them as the sole cause of the divorce. If asked what caused the divorce, they may quickly point to one or two of these incidents and blame themselves as the cause of the divorce.

Thus, if children think that they caused the divorce, then they often think that they can come up with a solution to the divorce. Bargaining can occur in many ways. It can occur as both a thought process where a person attempts to "wish" something into existence or to create a fantasy to ignore a painful reality. However, bargaining can also take the form of actions that a person engages in to convince others of an argument. In a divorce, this solution involves getting a child parents back together or trying to make them more friendly towards one another. Because the child already believes that they are the cause of the divorce, they believe that a solution is readily at hand. They may think up a solution that involves magical thinking, an appeal to a higher power, or focus upon a religious belief. These fantasies allow them to make psychological deals with themselves and come up with innovative ways of dealing with the situation.

Children may also broaden these fantasies to portray a positive image of their family to their friends. While the reality of separation, along with living with one parent at a time is upon them, they may tell their friends something about that parent that makes other children envious of them. For example, a child may tell their friends that their parent won millions of dollars in the lottery, is the CEO of a major corporation and often takes them on trips around the world that cost thousands of dollars. They also might say that their parents are famous scientists responsible



for some major scientific theory or are inventors who created the latest popular invention. Parents should be cognizant of these bargaining fantasies and should let their children know that it was a parental decision to have the divorce and that the divorce is the solution. Other ways to help your children through this phase are discussed at the end of this section.

#### **Stage 4-Depression**

This stage of depression is not the same as clinical depression. This is a stage of sadness that does not last for more than a few days. It is very important to be aware of the specific behaviors affiliated with this stage and to pay attention to the length of time that one experiences this stage. This feeling of depression is very similar to the feeling that one gets when he/she loses a loved one. He/she may be very sad for a few days or even a week or two, but then usually feels better afterward. After this short period in time, he/she feels normal again.

During this stage the major behaviors that parents should be aware of are: change in appetite, change in amount of sleep and disinterest in activities. Lethargy, prolonged sadness and an inability to focus and concentrate are also major indicators that a child is going through this phase. If these behaviors persist more than two weeks, professional psychological help may be needed. Change in appetite can mean either overeating or under eating. A child may avoid coming to the dinner table or may come and eat very little of his/her food. On the other hand, a child who is depressed may overeat. They may stuff themselves with food when they feel sad to help comfort themselves. Thus, watching a child's eating behavior is very important throughout the process of divorce. A change in sleep patterns can mean sleeping too much or not getting enough rest. The key is that a change has taken place. If a child's parent is used to him being up until 11:00pm every night and the child goes to bed at 11:15pm one night, then this does not constitute a change or a behavior that may be indicative of depression. Similarly, if a child always has trouble waking up for school every day, then being sleepy on any given morning would not constitute a change in behavior.

If a major change in eating, sleeping or interest in activities continues for more than two weeks you certainly want to be aware of it and may want to seek professional help for your child. You should also be on the lookout for self-medicating behaviors or thoughts of suicide. Moreover, you want to be aware of how your child is feeling. While most children who experience divorce do not self-medicate and do not have thoughts of suicide, you want to be aware of both behaviors and take any talk of suicide seriously. Please contact a mental health professional immediately or call your child's doctor for a referral.

#### **Stage 5—Acceptance**

Once a person reaches this stage, he/she has accepted the reality of the loss, and has experienced the anger and sadness that goes with that loss. He/she is able to accept the divorce and is willing to move on with his/her life. This does not mean that he/she has forgotten the divorce or what it felt like to go through it. Rather, these experiences are accepted as part of a process that he/she had to go through. During this final phase of acceptance, a person will resume normal, routine activities, is better able to focus and is ready to move on with life.

Earlier in this section, it was mentioned that some people experience the stages of loss and grief at different rates than others. For example, an older teen who has observed his/her parents argue, separate and get back together for years may have already experienced the stages of loss and grief years ago. When parents finally communicate that they are going to go through a divorce, the teen may indicate that he/she has already accepted the separation. In this example, the teenage child would have already been at the final stage of acceptance. While this is not the normal way that children experience the stages of loss and grief, it is mentioned here to show that not everyone experiences them at the same rate, at the same time or in the same order.

## **How to Help your Child through the Stages of Loss and Grief**

There are several approaches to helping your child through the stages of loss and grief. Two major approaches are discussed in this section. The first broad approach contains general actions you can take that will help your child adapt through every one of the stages. The second approach contains specific things that you can use to help your child during each of the stages.

### **Broad Approaches to Helping Your Child**

1. Stop arguing with the other parent. Children whose parents constantly argue may develop a poor image of themselves. This is partly because the parents are constantly degrading each other. When you degrade the child's parents then you also degrade the child.
2. To the greatest extent possible, keep every other aspect of your child's life the same and consistent. If your child goes to a school, attends extracurricular activities, and has certain friends, allow them to continue have them.
3. Be on time when you come to pick them up from the other parent's home. If you are running late or have an emergency and cannot make it, call and let your child know. Children will wait for hours on a parent who does not show up and they can experience extreme psychological discomfort if you do not show up on time.
4. Promote a healthy relationship between your child and the other parent. Allow them to have a picture of the other parent in their room or one that they can carry with them. Allow them to have the option to be able to call the other parent.
5. Take care of yourself. If you take care of yourself then you will model effective habits for your children. Take at least twenty minutes each day to do something for yourself. This may include reading a book, watching a favorite television program or talking to a friend on the phone.

### **Specific Things to Address at Each Stage**

#### **Stage 1—Denial**

1. Don't insist that your child accepts the divorce the first or second time you tell them about it. If your child is not ready to talk about the divorce, give them some time.

2. As mentioned above, keep other aspects of your child's life the same. This will provide a stable environment that may contribute to your child's coping abilities.
3. When talking to your children about the divorce, use phrases such as "some children feel" or "children who go through a divorce feel sad, sometimes" to help your child express his/her feelings. Use these phrases prior to asking them how they feel.

#### Stage 2—Anger

1. Identify feelings of anger by saying, "You sound angry." Let your child know that it is ok to feel angry, but that certain behaviors that result from their anger may be unacceptable. Give them acceptable ways of showing anger like taking a few minutes to themselves or communicating their feelings in a calm manner.
2. If your child throws temper tantrums or engages in other inappropriate behaviors, let them know that these behaviors are not acceptable.
3. If your child is experiencing difficulties in school, be proactive and inform the school that the family is going through some changes. By letting the school know that you are concerned about your child, they can help you support your child during the divorce. This will help your child because he/she is more likely to remain successful in school and school will be another aspect of your child's life that continues to be stable.

#### Stage 3—Bargaining

1. Remain consistent with your household rules. If possible, have the same set of rules in both parent's homes. A consistent set of rules will help to minimize the impact of moving from home to home.
2. If your child creates a story about himself or the family that is not true, let your child know the potential consequences of the myth. Do not argue with him/her about the validity of the myth, allow him/her know the consequences of others finding out that the fantasy might be untrue.
3. Reinforce value systems that your family holds. If your child has a strong set of values, they will be more likely to reference and follow those values throughout the grieving process.

#### Stage 4—Depression

1. Support your child and encourage behaviors that you consider normal behaviors.
2. Express your concern about any behaviors that you may deem to be a change from the norm.
3. Be aware of self-medicating behaviors and thoughts of suicide.

4. Seek professional assistance if behaviors persist for more than two weeks or if life threatening behaviors present themselves.

#### Stage 5—Acceptance

1. Continue to encourage your child in his/her acceptance.
2. Let your child know that you are always willing to listen to them if they would like to talk about the divorce or anything other topic.

## **How Divorce Affects Children at Different Developmental Stages**

Divorce is challenging for all children. The psychological effects of divorce include stress, confusion, low self-esteem, and depression. Children also have physical stressors such as moving back and forth between homes, changing neighborhoods and/or schools, and maybe even having to make new friends.

Children who are experiencing divorce may encounter a wide range of emotional turmoil. Sometimes children become very sad and often express their sadness by displaying anger and aggression. Many children are afraid that they will lose one, or even both, parents. Being afraid to lose a parent or the love of a parent can be very threatening to a child. A large number of children feel as though they are responsible for causing the break-up. One of the reasons this may occur is that parents that are not getting along may argue about issues related to the child. Children who feel responsible for the divorce may begin to feel guilty and ultimately ashamed. Some children will try to intervene by getting their parents back together.

### **Infants 0 to 2**

Young children 0-2 do not understand much about divorce. They understand that Daddy and Mommy will be living in separate homes. They may also notice that their parents are unhappy. Young children may mirror their parent's mood. They may cry more often and for longer times, they may become irritable easily, and they may seek more comfort from parents.

### **How parents can make a difference**

Keep as many things as possible consistent. Do not make too many changes at the same time. Children love routines, so try to do the things that were done before the separation. If possible keep the same caretakers. Encourage the other parent to spend lots of time with the child.

### **Toddlers 2 to 3**

Toddlers understand more about the divorce than infants. However, their knowledge about romantic relationships is still limited. They understand that Daddy and Mommy are no longer living together. They also understand that one parent does not live with them anymore.

They may have an increase in temper tantrums, they may cry more, and become anxious and fearful. These young children may become afraid of abandonment. They wonder when Daddy will come home or when Mommy will come home. They may cry when the non-residential parent is leaving. Their sense of parental attachment may become insecure. They may also have trouble going to or staying in bed. Many times this is because their bedtime routine has been interrupted. Other times, it is because they are awaiting the arrival of the non-residential parent.

### **How parents can make a difference**

Try to keep routines intact. Encourage visits from the other parent, Reassure your child that both parent still love him/her. Set aside a special one-on-one time to spend with your child. Provide your child with lots of love and attention.

### **Preschoolers 3 to 5**

Children at this stage understand that their parents are not living together anymore. They also understand that their parents are no longer getting along. They may understand that their parents are sad or angry.

They may feel angry themselves. Some children at this age feel a sense of hopelessness. On the other hand, they can feel a sense of optimism which can sometimes be unrealistic. Children at this age may have fantasies about the family getting back together and living happily ever after. They may believe that the divorce is their fault. They may think the divorce happened because they didn't clean their room or made a mess at the dinner table. They may express anger by yelling or fighting. Or they may feel angry on the inside and become withdrawn and isolate themselves.

### **How parents can make a difference**

You can sit down with your child and answer his/her questions. Be honest with your child and try to give him/her all the information he/she needs in an age appropriate manner. Let him know how the divorce will affect him/her. Reassure your child that the divorce is not his/her fault, Also, let your child know that your love will continue during and after the divorce. Teach your child how to express their feelings in a safe and appropriate way.

### **School Age Children 6 to 10**

Children at this stage understand much about divorce. They understand that their parents are separating due to an inability to get along or some type of conflict. However, many of them still believe that they may have caused or at least contributed to the separation/divorce.

They may feel betrayed by one, or both, parents. They may blame their parents for the divorce. Some children become very sad and depressed and feel that their parent/parents don't love them anymore. If the parent is with a new partner the child may feel that the parent has chosen the other person over them. Children who are deeply saddened may have difficulty eating or sleeping. Children may also suffer in school by displaying inappropriate behaviors or academic decline.

## **How parents can make a difference**

Talk to your children openly and honestly about the divorce. Provide a safe atmosphere for your child to talk about his/her feelings in reference to the divorce. Do not expect for your child to provide you with comfort. Don't discuss adult issues, such as child support, with your child. Respect your child's feelings about the divorce. Your child may not feel the same way that you feel. You may be sad about the divorce while your child is happy about the divorce. On the other hand, you may be happy about the divorce while your child may be sad about the divorce. Help your child to focus on the future. If you notice that your child is sleeping or eating too little or too much it is a good idea to seek professional help. Also, if your child is experiencing difficulties in school, talk to your child's teacher. Let the school know that the family is experiencing some changes,

## **Preteens and Teens 11 to 14**

At this stage children understand a lot about divorce and separation. Preteens usually require more support than teens because they may also be experiencing bodily and hormonal changes. Many older children may become angry at one or both parents. Sometimes preteens will make a decision on which parent is wrong and which is right. For example, they may blame a parent for the divorce if he/she is involved in another relationship. Often, older children choose sides with and against parents. They may feel that their parents have betrayed them. They might say hurtful things to their parents such as "I hate you" and "you're the worst parents ever." In extreme cases preteens may have negative feelings concerning romantic relationships. They may not want to love or trust anyone. Preteens who are depressed may lose or gain a lot of weight, stop enjoying their favorite activities, stay locked in their rooms, skip school, steal, and make up fantasies about themselves or other family members. On the other hand, if the preteen feels somewhat responsible for the divorce, they may improve their behavior and do things that they believe will help get their parents back together.

## **How parents can make a difference**

Provide time to talk about the divorce. Try to be honest with your child when discussing the divorce. At this age they may have a lot of questions. Try to answer as many of their questions as possible. If you don't have an answer tell them you don't know. Let them know that you care about their concerns. Help them to talk about their emotions. Remember that they are not your peers so keep the conversation appropriate. If your child makes a rude remark toward you or the other parent do not take it personal. However, let them know that these statements are inappropriate and off limits. Continue to provide discipline as usual.

## **Older Teens 15 to 18**

These children understand much more about romantic relationships. At this age many of them may be, or have been, involved in an intimate relationship themselves. They understand a considerable amount about a divorce and/or separation. They comprehend what a divorce means and are aware of many of the consequences that may come about as a result. However, they may still feel a lot of anger and frustration surrounding the divorce. Teens tend to make moral decisions and may attempt to decide which parent is “right.” Sometimes a teen may form an ally with the parent that he/she perceives to be “right.” Older teens can be very practical when facing a divorce. For example, they may want to know who is going to pay for college now that their parents are getting divorced. They may also want to decide who they should live with. Some teens may have major trouble dealing with the divorce. They may become deeply saddened. Pay attention and note if your child is sleeping and/or eating too much. Also some children may be eating too little, locking themselves in the bedroom, or isolating themselves.

### **How parents can make a difference**

Allow them to talk about their feelings and emotions. Talk about their concerns. A teen may have questions such as who’s going to pay for their college tuition. Some teens have expenses such as cell phone bills and car payments and may be concerned about the family’s finances. Do not encourage your child to take sides. Keep reinforcing that it is a decision made by both parents. Also, try not to give them any adult responsibilities such as which parent they should live with. Keep the conversation appropriate. Even though these children are older they are still children. Be aware of major changes regarding diet, activities, and school. If your teen has trouble coping with the divorce, don’t hesitate to seek professional help.



## **Talking with Your Children about the Divorce**

The best way for parents to tell their children about the divorce is in a quiet familiar home setting with both parents and all of the children present. Most children do not find out about a divorce by being told directly by their parents. Instead, they discover the divorce in an indirect way which often offers them little time for expression. Often, they overhear an argument or series of arguments, and then one parent leaves the home. When the parent does not come home, it is days, weeks or months before they see them. In many cases, parents do not formally communicate the implications of this separation to the child. This leaves the child only further confused when they come to the realization that their parents are no longer going to be married.

During their arguments, parents inevitably mention children in the context of a variety of situations. Children who witness a separation with no explanation for the separation zero in on these moments as the primary reasons that their parents have gotten divorced. Because these factors involve them, children usually think that they caused the divorce. In cases where a parent has left after one of these arguments and is gone for more than a day, children may begin to worry about the parent, think that they caused the parent to leave the home and wonder if the parent has a safe place to sleep at night.

Children can cope in numerous ways with the divorce. However, if they believe that they caused the parent to leave, they may begin to think that they can get their parents back together. Children may start to think that they have some sort of control over the divorce. If they think that they were the cause, then they might assume that they can readily generate a solution for the divorce. They may believe that if they try hard enough, they can bring the family back together. Children may try to get parents to talk on the phone, have them spend more time together when picking or dropping them off or invite them to events where both parents would be obligated to interact.

To avoid this situation, it is important for parents to have a formal conversation with their children as soon as they have decided to separate. Parents should choose a quiet setting that their children are familiar with to tell their children about the divorce. The conversation should be centered on the children's needs. Therefore, things like visitation times, and how holidays, birthdays and vacations will be spent with parents should be addressed. The legal process or things that concern parents should not be communicated with the child. Child support, alimony, extramarital affairs and reasons the parents do not get along should be avoided during this conversation. After the parents are done speaking, time should be left to express feelings or questions. This conversation should take place on a day when both parents have nothing to do afterwards.

Even parents who have carefully thought about the divorce often miss things that are important to their children. Even after parents cover all of the basics of holidays, visitation, activities and school, children may bring up things like a specific toy or pet. For example, they may ask if their pet goldfish is going to travel from home to home. Or they may ask if they can bring a toy with them when moving from home to home. If the parent does not have an answer for this, then they

should not make one up during the conversation. It is better to tell the children that they have raised a very important point and that you will have to think about it before you give them an answer. This will give both parents time to discuss the question and to come up with an appropriate solution.

### **Procedures to Follow when Discussing Divorce with Your Child**

1. Plan what you are going to say before you say it. Make sure that this list is centered on the child's needs and concerns. Create a list of the things that you want to cover so that you discuss all of the important things you want to address. Discuss how you want to communicate them to the children with the other parent and work on phrasing things in a way that does not cast blame on the other parent or family relationship. Make sure that you have chosen a quiet, comfortable place to speak to your children.

2. Make sure that you are in control of your feelings. Even with prior planning, the day that you planned to tell your children about the divorce you may have had a stressful time in other areas of your life. If you have had a bad day, are emotionally rattled and planned to talk about the divorce, you may want to choose another day for this conversation. Even if you have had a wonderful day, consider how the other parent's day has gone and how difficult the day has been for your children. If it is not a good day, choose another day to talk to your children about the divorce.

3. Make sure that the entire family is present when you break the news about the divorce. During this conversation, both parents should communicate the message to all of the children at the same time. The presence of both parents at the meeting sends a strong message to the children that although their parents are separating, they will be united for their children's sake. Having all children present is very important because it prevents one child from finding out about the divorce from another child. While one-on-one conversations between a parent and child can take place at a later date, the initial conversation should be a group discussion.

4. Make it clear right away that this was a decision that you've made. Assure your children that you will continue to be their parents and that your decision to separate is the solution. Let your children know that you tried to make things work but the best thing for the family is the divorce. Tell the children that they are not to blame for the divorce. Let them know that your love will continue and that both parents will continue to be their parents. Children often think that they caused the divorce, are losing one or both parents and that their parents don't love them anymore. They need all of these assurances throughout the conversation.

5. Be aware that children at different ages will have different needs and will interpret things differently. Young children will have different concerns than older children. Toddlers will not be able to comprehend the meaning of divorce. They will mainly be aware of the absence of one parent. During the first few years of elementary school, children will have a broader comprehension of visitation with each parent, but may not be ready for an extremely detailed explanation of all divorce related issues. These children will understand that they will be able to

spend holidays and birthdays with one parent or the other, but may not need to know with which parent they will be visiting on any specific holiday. On the other hand, older children, in later elementary school, middle school or high school may ask detailed questions about the specifics of the divorce. If a parent has children of varying ages, the children should be told about the divorce, some general aspects of visitation, a few specific details that older children may appreciate and then parents should open the conversation to questions. This will allow all of the children to ask questions that are important to them. If you do not have an answer for a child, tell them that you will have to think about their question and that you will get back to them with an answer.

### **Talking to Children After They Know about the Divorce**

Even if children have found out about the divorce by overhearing an argument and seeing a family member leave home, it is important to have a formal conversation with them. In cases where one parent did not communicate effectively with the child about the divorce, having the conversation at a later date is a good idea. This conversation should cover all of the important aspects of the divorce and should be child centered. However, it is a good idea not to consider this a onetime event that will never be discussed again. Regular discussion of the divorce with your children is a good idea. This communication should be a two way conversation and should allow plenty of time for your child to express himself/herself.

### **How to Uncover Your Child's Feelings about the Divorce**

When parents ask children how they feel about the divorce, they may say that they feel fine. If a parent asks a child, "Do you feel sad?" their child may say that they do not. Many children feel as though if they say, "Yes, I feel sad," that they are saying that they are a sad person and that sadness is part of their personality. Therefore, a child may resist saying that they are feeling sad even though a divorce can be an extremely traumatic situation for them.

Using the words "some" and "sometimes" while asking about a feeling can help the child feel less pressured to respond. At times, children need help communicating their feelings. It is easier for a child to communicate when the focus is not on them. You can start the conversation by saying, "Some children feel sad when they go through a divorce. Do you feel sad, sometimes?" The word "some" helps the child feel as though they are part of a group. The word "sometimes" removes the child's association of that feeling with the child's personality. While both "some" and "sometimes" do not have to be used together, they can be used to help children share.

Another technique that can be used to help children communicate about the divorce is repeating what they just said and asking a question. If a child says, "I feel sad." A parent can respond, "You feel sad? Do you feel that way a lot?" Thus, by repeating the statement and adding a question to it, a parent can help a child communicate their feelings. As parents give their children the opportunity to share at other points during the day, they will be more likely to approach their parents and share their feelings about the divorce.

# Building Parent-Child Relationships

## The Genuine Encounter

The Genuine Encounter is a technique that parents can use to improve their relationship with their children. The Genuine Encounter was created by Dorothy Briggs. In her book, Your Child's Self-Esteem she discusses how parents can utilize planned and unplanned moments in their daily parenting activities to enhance their relationship with their children.

Parents spend an inordinate amount of time controlling, correcting, directing and questioning their children. The Genuine Encounter is a time in which parents do not direct or control the behavior of their child or the conversation with their children. It can take place as a planned period of 5-10 minutes or as an unplanned moment in time. When one builds a stronger relationship with his/her child this helps to build self-esteem and to reinforce the three basic emotional needs of love, belonging and power. Thus, the conversation during the genuine encounter is child directed and it is child controlled. The parent allows time for the child to connect and ask questions.

Some parents are very good at creating genuine encounters. These parents are excellent at communicating with their children and are able to create genuine encounters throughout the day. They are able to bring about genuine encounters by showing appreciation for their child's actions and maintaining a positive demeanor. They naturally ask questions to further understand their child and offer encouragement during the conversation.

From a child's perspective, when a parent creates a genuine encounter he/she is taking the time to level the playing field of power. During a genuine encounter, the parent is temporarily giving up some power. For the duration of the genuine encounter, the child feels as if he/she is not being judged. It is his/her opportunity to open up and share his/her world with the parent. If you are a parent like the one just mentioned who naturally creates genuine encounters, then you are helping to build the self-esteem of your children.

Not all parents naturally create genuine encounters when they are with their children. In fact, most parents could enhance the way they communicate with their children by creating additional genuine encounters. If you are not the type of parent who naturally receives feedback from your children and allows them to direct the conversation, there are several things you can do to create genuine encounters.

You can begin by taking approximately 10 minutes on the days you are with your children to have a genuine encounter. For you, this may be a planned time, but for your children, it will seem to be natural because it will come at a time when you are not under pressure to focus on something else. Start by asking your child, "What was the best part of your day?" or "What was the best part of your week?" When your child answers the question, you can say, "Why did you like it?" or "What else did you like?" or "Tell me more." These open ended, clarifying questions allow your child to direct the conversation. They are different from the questions parents usually

ask like, “Why don’t you clean your room?” These questions are directing questions that make the child feel as if he/she cannot share. Instead, by asking “What did you like about your day, so far?” you are asking a question that places the child in charge of the conversation. By being given temporary control of the conversation, children are more likely to share with the parent at other times when they need to share. Thus, as they get older and become teens, they will be more likely to share both bad and good experiences with their parents. They will also be more likely to turn to their parents for advice than to rely on a peer for advice.

If your child is already a teenager and you feel as though there is a breakdown in communication, the genuine encounter is a phenomenal way of starting anew and improving your relationship with your child. Even in extreme circumstances, where there is a severe breakdown in communication, the genuine encounter can be used in conjunction with other techniques to increase the frequency of communication between parent and teen, to build self-esteem and to improve the relationship.

There are other formal ways of creating genuine encounters. A parent can tell their child when picking them up, “I had a rough week but now that you’re here, everything is better.” This helps to build self-esteem and if the child is given an opportunity to respond, it allows for the opportunity to create a genuine encounter. In his show “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.” Fred Rogers was extremely effective at connecting with children and encouraging them. Here are three things that he said:

1. You know, you made this a really special day just by being yourself.
2. There’s only one person in the world like you.
3. I like you just the way you are.

These statements release the child momentarily from having the stress of life on their shoulders. They help to alleviate the pressure of having to do chores, complete their homework and clean their room. By using these statements in conjunction with questions that encourage children to share, genuine encounters can be created. In turn, the child feels like he/she has a meaningful place in the family and the world. These statements help the child to build confidence, self-esteem and to become well rounded individuals. When paired with follow up questions, parent’s can both enhance self-esteem and engage in genuine encounters. Parents who use the genuine encounter to build self-esteem in their children help them develop purpose and poise to succeed in life.

Of course there are times to control, correct, direct and question your child’s behavior. Giving your child guidance through direction is very important. Without proper direction children will not have the framework to consistently navigate through many of the difficulties that they encounter. However, the genuine encounter is not one of these times. It is a time for parents to further understand their child’s perspective about life. It is a time to connect, to listen, to be enthusiastic and to offer praise and encouragement.

## **PRIDE Special Play Time**

Young children learn how the world works through their play. They learn communication and interaction skills. They learn about sharing with and caring for others. They also learn complex

skills such as understanding their emotions; managing frustrations, problem solving, developing creative and imaginary thinking.

Parents of younger children between the ages of two to seven can implement a special play time. This special play time should take place every day and lasts roughly 10 minutes. The PRIDE Skills are a set of simple guidelines, presented by UC Davis CAARE Center that will help you to have positive interactions with your child and build a positive connection. These play skills are based on behavioral therapy and were presented by Dr. Sheila Eyeberg and can be used to build positive relationships between children, 2-7 years old, and their primary caretakers. This special time has also been noted to decrease challenging behaviors that children sometimes exhibit.

<b>PRIDE Play Skills</b>	<b>Example</b>		<b>Positive Outcome</b>
	<i>Child's Action</i>	<i>Mom's/Dad's Response</i>	
<b>P Praise</b>	Child makes a dinosaur of play dough and is playing calmly	You say "I like the way you are playing so gently with your dinosaur"	Increases the likelihood that your child will engage in positive behaviors.
<b>R Reflect</b>	Your child says "I made a dinosaur"	You say "Yes, you made a dinosaur"	Your child will know that you are actively listening to what he/she says.  Your child feels that he has some control of the play session.
<b>I Imitate</b>	Child makes a roaring dinosaur sound	You make a roaring dinosaur sound also	You are allowing your child to lead.  You are modeling imitation behavior for your child. Imitation is a key skill for learning.
<b>D Describe</b>	Child makes his dinosaur walk	You say "Your dinosaur is walking"	This helps your child to put words to his actions.  Your child will know that he/she has your attention
<b>E Excitement</b>	Child is making his dinosaur	You say "Wow, that's a great looking dinosaur"	Your child feels encouraged.

The chart below provides various details about the Do's and Don'ts of PRIDE.

DO	DON'T
Do ignore your child when he/she is behaving inappropriately (except when dangerous)	Do not pay attention (make eye contact, verbally reprimand, punish) to your child for engaging in inappropriate behaviors.
Do praise your child for behaviors you want him/her to display. Provide lots of encouragement.	Do not criticize the way your child plays or provide constructive criticism. Remember ALL criticism is criticism.
Do let your child take the lead and you play along with him/her.	Do not be controlling during playtime
Do give your child the opportunity to choose the toys he/she wants to play with.	Don't play the games that only you like
Do use PRIDE skills when appropriate behavior is present.	Do not use PRIDE skills when inappropriate behavior is present
Do use pride play time to build a positive relationship between you and your child	Do not use this as a time to discipline or correct your child. At times your child will need correction but this is not that time.

There are also implications that children who experience positive child-parent interaction are less likely to suffer mental health issues. It is important to note that this special play time should not be based on your child's behavior. Your child should receive this activity whether or not he/she was good. Think of this time as not only a fun time for your child but also as an opportunity for you to teach the skills that your child needs. If your young child is experiencing serious behavioral issues, you should contact a behavioral specialist or mental health provider. Don't be afraid to seek assistance. There are many programs and providers who have the knowledge and experience to assist you.

## Family Dinner

Today, many families do not sit down and have dinner together. The home has become a place where we eat, dress, watch TV, talk on the phone, and sleep. However, we often forget to socialize with each other. Everything is done on an individual basis. We don't watch TV together. Moreover, many of us have forgotten how to play board games, and the family dinner at the table is almost obsolete. In many cases parents have made a conscious effort to not spend time with the family. However, some parents have busy lives. A parent today can work several

jobs trying to “make ends meet.” Family dinner is one of the best things we can do to build positive relationships among members. During family dinner we have an opportunity to explore each other’s thoughts and feelings. Children may reveal things that have occurred earlier at school or on the playground. Adults may talk about what’s going on at the workplace. Family dinner, not only gives us a chance for discussion but also a chance to talk about solutions to problems. The best solutions are often the ones given during a family dinner. In addition, children learn communication skills, and they also learn how to build healthy relationships. Most importantly, they understand that they are valued by their parent because you are taking the time to sit down and socialize with them.

### **Encouraging Positive Behaviors**

Many times parents place their children on timeout, spank their children or are quick to implement some other form of punishment when their child acts in an unacceptable manner. On the other hand, when children behave appropriately they go unnoticed and are not complemented by parents. Children need encouragement. The more encouragement they receive for good behaviors the more they will continue to show these behaviors. Congratulate your child for everything that he does well. For example, if your child cleans his/her room tell him or her, “Wow, I like the good job you did cleaning your room!” Even though it is your child’s responsibility to clean his/her room, encouraging him/her in this way will only lead to your child feeling appreciated, and cleaning their room more often. Parents can even encourage their children when they complete small tasks. For example, if a child says something nice to a sibling, he/she can be recognized. The more recognition that he/she receives, the more likely he/she is to show kindness toward other children.

### **Offer Praise**

Offer praise whenever it is appropriate. Children admire their parents. They want to please you. Therefore, it is your responsibility to let them know when you are pleased with their actions. Do not wait for perfection to offer praise. You can praise your child for making improvements and for making a genuine effort.

Also, children should not be compared to their siblings, or other children in the family or neighborhood. Your child should only be compared to himself/herself. Comparing your child to other children sends the message that they are not good enough for you. Children may even think that you wish the other child were your son/daughter instead of them.

When praising your child, make sure that you are honest. Also, try to stay away from double messages when providing praise. For example, a parent would want to avoid saying, “Good job on your math test, too bad you failed that science test last week.” Your child needs praise that is clear and sincere. When you offer praise point out exactly what they child did to earn that praise. For instance instead of saying “You’re a good boy” consider saying “I saw you sharing your bike with Tommy, that was a nice thing you did.”



## **Eliminating Constructive Criticism**

Constructive criticism is when an individual corrects another individual based upon the idea that the criticism is beneficial to that person. Constructive criticism offers honest feedback that helps a person correct a behavior or improve himself/ herself. The idea is to help a person improve by being honest about their shortcomings. Constructive criticism usually happens in the workplace when a supervisor provides feedback to an employee concerning his work ethic or an assignment. It also happens at home with parents when they try to correct their child's behavior concerning an inappropriate behavior or action. A parent provides this criticism as a way of helping their child to correct their inappropriate behavior. During constructive criticism, parents may say things that injure the child's feelings. However, parents don't see this as a bad thing because their ultimate goal is to help the child. Constructive criticism is viewed here as the opposite of criticism.

However, constructive criticism should be seen as a form of criticism. It's not the opposite of criticism. Rather, the opposite of criticism is encouragement. Constructive criticism can result in a positive outcome. On the other hand, constructive criticism can have a negative outcome. A person who is giving constructive criticism does not know whether or not the criticism is constructive. What determines whether a criticism is constructive or destructive is the outcome that it has on the person who is being criticized. Two people may receive the same criticism stated in the same manner and have a different reaction to this feedback.

We are not saying to never criticize your children. However, criticism is criticism whether it is constructive or not. Thus, constructive criticism should not be viewed as something that is positive or encouraging. Instead, begin to view constructive criticism as something separate from encouragement. Constructive criticism focuses on what is wrong and how to correct it. Encouragement focuses on what is right and how to make it better. Encouraging your child is something that should occur more often than criticism. Offering encouragement helps to get your child to show the behaviors that will help him/her in the world. A child who receives lots of encouragement is more likely to accept constructive criticism as helpful feedback.

## **Promoting A Healthy Relationship Between Your Child and the Other Parent**

Divorce occurs for many reasons. Sometimes, there are some deep rooted feelings of resentment that led to the divorce. Most divorces do not just occur in one day. Typically, a series of arguments and bad feelings mount up over time and led to one partner filing for divorce. Despite this resentment, your children are not divorcing the other parent. Therefore, they should be allowed to have and further develop a positive relationship with the other parent.

There are a few things that you can do that will have a positive impact upon your child's relationship with the other parent. First, do not argue with the other parent in front of the children. When parents argue in front of children it can hurt them deeply. Also, speaking negatively about the other parent hurts your child. Second, let your child know that the other

parent loves them and cares about them. Letting them know that the other parent loves them sends a strong message to your child. Your child will feel that he/she is worthy. Telling your child that the other parent does not love them may make them feel unloved and unworthy.

## **Step Parenting**

Parents may have concerns about dating after a divorce. Wanting to find someone to love after a divorce or separation is most natural. However, one must be aware of the emotional risks of new relationships on children. If you have decided to start dating again please be cautious in regards to your children. Not everyone whom you have chosen to date needs to be introduced to your children. The general consensus about dating new people after a divorce is that parents should not introduce a new boyfriend or girlfriend to their children until they are highly sure that this individual is going to be around for a long time. Having your dates move in and out of your children's lives can be emotionally stressful to them, as well as, dangerous. Also, you do not want your children to get the message that love and relationships are not long lasting and therefore should be taken for granted.

In addition, it is a wise idea to keep step parents/new relationships out of the divorce proceedings. The divorce and/or separation proceedings should only involve the divorcing parents. Involving other individuals may only make the process more complicated. Many parents find it difficult to negotiate when there is a third party involved.

## **Providing Discipline**

Contrary to what people may believe, children love rules, guidance and discipline. When you provide discipline for your child you are sending him/her the message that you care. On the other hand, children who do not receive discipline from their parents may feel unloved. Discipline is a teaching process. Discipline teaches children the difference between inappropriate and appropriate behavior. Discipline should not only be provided when our children behave in ways in which we disapprove. It should be a continuous teaching and learning process.

It is best to think about discipline as a positive process not as a negative one. Discipline should be viewed as a natural part of parenting and not a burden on parents. It is important to note that discipline is not only the responsibility of the parents. Your child is also responsible for their own discipline. When children are held accountable for their own discipline they will eventually learn self-discipline. Self-discipline is the ultimate goal of discipline. We want our children to be self-disciplined as they become adults.

When we provide discipline for our children we are setting limits for them. Eventually, as our children become adults they will learn to set limits for themselves. Children love rules that are clear and well defined. They also like rules that are consistent. However, being consistent does not mean never changing the rules. We want to make the rules easy for our children to follow. If you decide to change the rules you should make it clear that the rules are being changed before

implementing any consequences. Keep in mind that you will have to change the rules as your children mature to accommodate their stage of development and other individual factors including skill level and cognitive understanding.

Rules may be adjusted in either direction to accommodate the child's maturity level. This means that sometimes the rules will become more challenging and other times the rules may become less challenging. For instance, you may have to make a rule easier to accommodate a child who is consistently unable to comply. Once the child is able to comply, you can slowly make it more difficult. Rules, like everything else, should not be written in stone.

### **Why Children Misbehave**

Children misbehave for a variety of reasons. Your child may misbehave because he is trying to obtain or gain something. Children may also misbehave because they are afraid or feel unsafe. Some children will misbehave simply because they don't know how to behave. Whatever causes your child to misbehave, there is something that you can do to help them with their behavior. Several suggestions on how to help children who misbehave follow in the sections below.

### **Role Model appropriate behaviors for your child**

Children will do what you do and not what you say to do. Your children admire you and they want to be just like you. In general children take the philosophy: "If it's good enough for mommy, then it's good enough for me." Thus, if there are any behaviors or habits that you engage in and do not want your child to model, then don't do them in the presence of your child. Parents who are experiencing divorce can model many skills for their children including anger control, conflict resolution, and communication.

### **Reduce Conflict in your Home**

Promote positive communication at home. You want interactions between you and your child to be positive. Your child should look forward to a fun time at home, not conflict. For younger children you may want to reduce saying "no." The word "no" is an absolute word that many children interpret as "never" and young children tend to protest once they hear the word. Instead of saying no, try saying later, or maybe another time or after dinner.

### **Provide Consistency**

Be consistent with the rules and the specified consequences. Do not give out punishments that you can't keep. Punishments or consequences have to be something that your child can complete and that you can complete. Do not give your child a punishment that is too harsh. Many parents hand out punishments that are too harsh and then they renege on them. Your children will get the message that you are inconsistent and your words cannot be taken seriously. To avoid this situation, have routines and schedules for children. If children misbehave and you are upset, take some time before you make decisions concerning punishment. Sometimes, you may be too upset

to decide on a proper consequence. Make a decision with careful consideration. If you decide that a specific punishment is needed, make sure that you can see that it is completed and that your child can complete it.

### **Control Your Resources**

Parents should be in charge of the resources in the home. A parent should not blame electronic equipment for their child's inappropriate behaviors. If your child is imitating inappropriate behaviors viewed on TV then he is learning it from you. If the show is not pleasing to you then it only makes sense to turn off the TV set. There is nothing wrong about mandating that your child watch appropriate shows in order to gain access to the television set. You can set up opportunities for your child to earn TV time and videogame time throughout the day. This gives your child the chance to control his/her own behavior.

### **Focus on Positive Behaviors**

Do not seek out opportunities to discipline and correct your child. Seek out opportunities to praise and encourage your child. Instead of telling your child "not what to do," tell him "what to do." Try to focus on the behaviors that you want to see rather than the ones you don't want to see. A child who engages in positive interaction with his/her parents is more likely to behave appropriately.

### **Be Sensitive**

Use discipline procedures that are sensitive to your child's feelings. You do not want to use methods that will make your child feel ashamed or unloved. Using harsh words can permanently damage your child's self esteem. If you must criticize something then criticize the behavior. For example, never tell your child, "You're a liar." Instead say, "You did not tell the truth earlier." Contrary to what many people think, you can be a sensitive and firm parent at the same time.

### **Know the 5 Positive Parenting Rules**

Positive parenting is a set of techniques that are based on behavioral theory. The basic idea is that behavior can either be increased or decreased based on its consequences. The parenting rules defined here were presented by Glenn Latham.

The five parenting rules are:

**Rule 1:** *Clearly explain your expectations to your children.* Let them know what behaviors you will attend to. Let your child know what will happen once the behavior is displayed. Once you have finished explaining your expectations to your children have them explain them back to you. This ensures that your child understands what behaviors are required and the consequences associated with those behaviors

**Rule 2:** *Ignore inconsequential behaviors.* When possible ignore minor unwanted behaviors. These minor behaviors may be age related such as sibling rivalry, not making the bed, nagging, and slamming the bedroom door. The basic idea is not to pay attention to behaviors that are not important. Paying attention to minor behaviors may result in an increase in those unwanted behaviors.

**Rule 3:** *Selectively reinforce appropriate behaviors.* Seek out opportunities to praise your child for engaging in positive behaviors. The more you reinforce/praise a child for a behavior the more likely that behavior will be increased.

**Rule 4:** *Stop then redirect inappropriate behavior.* Stop your child from participating in negative behaviors. Do not pay attention to your child while stopping them. Physically teach your child the appropriate way to behave by modeling the appropriate behaviors and walking them through the steps to complete them appropriately.

**Rule 5:** *Stay close to your children.* Be a loving parent. Tell your children how much you love them. Children, even teens, love hugs and kisses. Get involved with things that your children love. Being a loving parent who is fun to be around makes it more likely that your children will want to be with you and will comply with your requests.

### **Seek Professional Help**

Sometimes it may be difficult for a parent to provide discipline for a child. You may find yourself, constantly punishing or arguing with your child. Maybe your child's school is calling you on a regular basis to make complaints. Sometimes it may be that your child is outright non-compliant and disrespectful. Parents in this situation may begin to provide harsh punishments or give up on discipline altogether. If you are in a situation where you feel as though you are losing control, please reach out for professional help. The earlier you seek help, the more likely the intervention is to work.

## Conflict Resolution

Here are some ideas you can use when talking to the other parent:

1. **Use “I” statements.** Tell the other parent how you feel rather than how he/she feels. Instead of saying, “You are late to get John because you don’t care,” say “when you are late to get John I feel very frustrated.”
2. **Don’t blame the person.** Focus on what your child did. Instead of saying, “You are a sneaky person,” say “I did not like what happened earlier.”
3. **Avoid words that are obsolete** such as: “You always do that,” “You can’t stop doing that,” or “You will never be on time.”
4. **Let the other parent know how their actions affected you** instead of what you think their intentions are. For instance “when you bring Johnny home late it makes me late for work” rather than “I know you bring Johnny home late because you want me to be late for work.”
5. **Be aware of non-verbal behaviors** such as body language and voice tone. When it comes to effective communication the saying holds true: “Action speaks louder than words.” In order to effectively communicate with the other parent you must be aware of and understand his/her body language, voice tone, and facial expressions. Paying close attention to these non-verbal cues can give you direction as to where the conversation is headed.
6. **Focus on the current issue.** Try to stay away from bringing up the past. If you bring up previous conflicts the other parent may view you as being unforgiving and resentful. If he/she thinks that you are blaming them, it may hinder them from working toward a positive outcome. Focus on the present situation.
7. **Focus on a solution.** Many times when we are engaged in a conflict we tend to focus on who is wrong and who is right. The reality is that Dad may never want to admit that he is wrong and Mom may never want to admit that she is wrong. Therefore, it is useless to engage in a back and forth process to determine who is wrong and who is right. The reality may be that no one is right and no one is wrong. It may just be a difference of opinions. Thus, we encourage parents to focus on solving the problem.
8. **Focus on a win-win solution.** Somehow we got the idea that when we are in conflict it will result in a winner and a loser. However, there is only one way to resolve a conflict. The only way to truly resolve a conflict is to have a win-win solution. A win-win solution means that both parents are satisfied with the outcome. If you have a win-lose situation where one parent is pleased and the other is displeased, there may be feelings of resentment. The parent who is unhappy may find ways to get revenge on the other parent. When both parents are pleased, there will be fewer feelings of resentment and fewer revenge tactics.

# **Domestic Violence**

## **What is Domestic Violence?**

Domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence includes a pattern of behaviors that is used by one partner to obtain or retain power over the other partner.

Domestic violence can be physical abuse, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. Many times the abuse includes a combination of these types of abuse. The abusive actions may result in the abused partner feeling humiliated, frightened, afraid for their lives, ashamed, and physically injured. Sadly, abusive relationships may also result in death.

Domestic violence can be inflicted on both men and women. Domestic abuse does not respect age, educational level, political affiliation, or religious affiliations. In addition, this form of abuse threatens every race and every ethnicity. It is important to note that domestic violence is not reserved for married couples or couples living together. Domestic violence can happen to couples who are newly dating and also to teens.

## **Some indications of Intimate Partner Violence are:**

- ☐ Your partner constantly corrects you, puts you down, or criticizes you.
- ☐ Your Partner hits you or threatens to hurt you.
- ☐ Your partner controls all the resources in the home such as food, money, telephones, television and/or other resources.
- ☐ Your partner isolates you from your family and friends.
- ☐ Your partner does not allow you to go to school or to work.
- ☐ Your partner forces you to have sex or hurts you during sex.
- ☐ Your partner threatens you as though you are an object during sex.
- ☐ Your partner requests that you seek his/her permission before agreeing to attend all and any events.
- ☐ Your partner requires that you have his/her permission before you have any over or leave the home.
- ☐ Your partner kicks, punches, slaps, or spits on you.
- ☐ Your partner has threatened you with a knife, gun, or any weapon.

- ☐ Your partner has hurt, or threatened to hurt, your kids, family, friends, or pets.
- ☐ Your partner breaks things and/ or throws when he/she gets angry.
- ☐ Your partner drives fast or dangerously to scare you.
- ☐ Your partner frequently insults you in regards to your appearance.
- ☐ Your partner wants you to dress in sexually provocative ways.
- ☐ Your partner wants you to cover your entire body.
- ☐ Your partner accuses you of looking at other people or being too flirty.
- ☐ Your partner accuses you of having sex or an intimate affair with someone else.
- ☐ Your partner does things to scare you such as locking you outside at night.
- ☐ Your partner expects for you to keep the home in perfect condition and beats you, or screams at you when it is not.
- ☐ Your partner ridicules you in the presence of friends, makes fun of you, or criticizes you to his/her friends.

If you, or someone you know, is involved in a partner violence relationship please call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233), 1-800-787-3224 (TTY). You can also contact a domestic violence center that is local to your area.



## **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Child abuse rarely occurs once. It usually happens frequently and the level of violence involved tends to increase. When child abuse occurs, it usually occurs from someone who has a close relationship with the child. It occurs in all socioeconomic and cultural groups. It creates a feeling of fear among children that their parent, caregiver or step-parent is going to physically harm them. Children may blame themselves for the abuse or they may feel shame for loving the person who abused them.

There are a few main types of child abuse. These categories include physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. These types of child abuse are discussed in separate sections below. After these sections, there are some suggestions on how to help children who have been victims of child abuse.

### **Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse is when a child is purposefully injured by another person. This includes bruises, burns and fractured bones. One should be aware of marks in the shape of a belt or stick. Parents who physically abuse children often hesitate to take them to the doctor, and do not have coherent explanations of how the injuries occurred. Physical abuse leaves a physical mark but it usually comes with emotional abuse. Usually, verbal abuse accompanies physical abuse. Even when verbal abuse does not accompany physical abuse, emotional damage is usually caused by physical abuse. A child that has been physically abused may be afraid to go back to his/her home and may be afraid of other adults. Physically abused children may become very aggressive or may withdraw from interacting with others.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is when a child's social and psychological well being is damaged by the actions of another person. Emotional abuse usually accompanies physical abuse but it can also independently occur. Emotional abuse may come in the form of a threat, denial of affection, or perpetual criticism. A child who has been emotionally abused may have low self-esteem, may be aggressive, withdrawn and/or suffer for depression.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse is defined by any contact between a child and adult that is sexual. This includes displaying pornography to children, exposing body parts, inappropriate touching and sex. Sometimes there are physical signs of sexual abuse such as venereal disease or itching, pain or bleeding in the genital area. Children may also refuse to take part in physical education class or in sports. However, many times there is no physical sign of abuse. There may be emotional signs of abuse such as anger, fear or depression. A child may have difficulty forming relationships with peers and may show an inappropriate interest in sexual activity for his/her age group.

School performance of children who are abused often changes drastically. Older children who are abused may run away, abuse drugs or become sexually active with their peers.

## **Neglect**

Neglect is when a parent or caregiver does not provide food, shelter, clothing, healthcare education and/or emotional support for a child. Neglect is the most frequent form of abuse. A child who is being neglected may constantly be hungry or malnourished. They may have poor hygiene, may not have their medical or dental needs met or may be dressed inappropriately for the weather. A child may stay at school after dismissal or may arrive too early. He/she may be very eager to help out others and may look for bad things to happen. A child may have difficulty concentrating or learning in school, and may have low self-esteem.

## **How to Help a Child Who has been Abused**

Often, abuse continues to occur because no adult takes it seriously. It takes a lot of courage for a child to approach an adult and tell them about abuse. If this occurs, it is important to remain calm and to not deny what the child is telling you. It is also important to not be overly shocked or disgusted when the child shares with you. Victims of abuse often blame themselves. Let the child know that they have not done anything wrong, and be sure not to interrogate them. Allow them to share what happened in their own words, and avoid asking leading questions. Be sure to contact your local child protective services organization or to call the Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD. Stopping abuse helps the child to heal.

You can help a child that has been abused in several ways. To help a child rebuild his/her self-esteem, praise them when they complete a task successfully or engage in a positive behavior. This can be something as simple as clearing their plate off of the table or being polite to family members. You can also build self-esteem by telling them that you love them, and having genuine encounters with them (see the section on the Genuine Encounter). Ask the child to share more about his/her good experiences in life and emphasize those experiences. This will help them to feel like they are being respected. Encourage the child to pursue things for which they have a talent or are good at doing. Give the child a set of rules to follow and be consistent when enforcing them. Model appropriate behaviors and offer praise when your child behaves appropriately. Consider taking the child to a therapist. Therapists can help children work through issues related to the abuse, and help them to develop innovative ways of coping.

## **Coping with a Divorce and/or Separation**

It is difficult to face the end of a romantic relationship. A separation from a loved one can be painful. There is an emotional loss, a loss of companionship, loss of shared goals and dreams. Often, individuals who are married believe that the relationship will last a lifetime. When things don't go as planned hurt feelings such as regret and anger may develop.

You may also have financial concerns including who will pay the mortgage, the car payments, children's school fees, healthcare and other bills. It is not unusual for parents to be concerned about these issues.

### **Learn the Stages of Loss and Greif**

Make sure that you understand how the grief process works. From time to time your mind will reflect on these stages as you are experiencing them. You may find that you are not experiencing these stages in order. Keep in mind that you are an individual and that your experiences throughout the process may differ from other people's experiences.

### **Who is your Support Team?**

Think about all the people in your life who are willing to offer their support. These people may include your siblings, your parents, your friends, your religious leaders, people at work, the family members of the other parent, and the other parent. You can use the space below to write the names of members on your support team.

**Name**

**Phone#**

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### **Take a Time Out**

Going through a divorce can be overwhelming. Not only do you have many legal issues to consider but you also have to continue with your normal routines and responsibilities. Allow yourself time to feel free. Take a time out and do something nice for yourself. Some ideas include:

### **Read a Good Book**

Reading can be therapeutic. Find a quiet remote space where you can relax without disturbance. Reading a good book can help you to relax. Reading can stimulate your imagination and improve your focus. Research has shown that reading is one of the best ways to relax. Don't hesitate to go and grab a book, go to your cozy corner, read and relax. You can even take your favorite drink or snack with you.

### **Enjoy a Cup of Tea**

Tea has always been considered as a way to bring warmth and relaxation to one's day. The healing power of tea is wonderful. It gives you an opportunity to sit back and relax. Make a cup of your favorite tea and sip it slowly.

### **Get a Professional Massage**

Massage has been known to help people relax and decreases stress on the body. Massage may reduce pain, sleeplessness, and fatigue. Massage helps us to feel good in the body as well as good in the mind. It can make you feel more optimistic and promotes a positive outlook on life. It can also help us to be more focused and can enhance our creative thinking.

### **Get a Pedicure/Manicure**

Take some time for yourself. Go to the parlor and enjoy a manicure or a warm foot pedicure. A pedicure can be relaxing to your feet. It can make tired feet feel comfort and an aching feet feel relief.

### **Have Someone Else Prepare Dinner**

Have a friend or two prepare a nice meal for you. Having another person prepare a meal helps to alleviate the stress of having to do the work yourself and will help to reinforce the idea that you are not alone during the divorce. Go out to dinner at your favorite restaurant or be adventurous and try something new.

### **Take a Yoga Class**

Take some "you time" and go enjoy a yoga class. Yoga rejuvenates the body. Yoga offers relaxing stretching and rejuvenating poses. Yoga teaches breathing techniques to reduce stress

and improves relaxation. If you don't have the finances to take a class, try watching a video online and follow the steps. To make your session more enjoyable add some relaxing music.

### **Watch Your Favorite Movie**

A good movie can turn a bad day into a good day. Watch an old time favorite movie. You can watch a movie about divorce. There is a list of movies in the back of this book. However, you don't have to view a movie about divorce; you can choose any topic that you like. Just make sure it is enjoyable and that you feel relaxed. You can make it more festive by adding popcorn, fruit and other snacks while watching the movie.

### **Take on a New Hobby**

Sometimes we are stressed because there is too much to do and too little time to get it done. On the other hand, we can also be stressed because there is too much time and not enough to do. Boredom can definitely be a source of stress. If you are bored, it is time to find a new hobby.

### **Make it a Learning Experience**

The divorce is in the past. We understand that some parents may have had a difficult marriage and/or divorce; however we want to encourage you to move forward. You can think of this divorce/separation as a learning experience. Think about how this situation has helped you to grow and mature. Think about the lessons you have learned that will help you in your future relationships.

### **See a Therapist/Counselor**

If your feelings of fear and/or anger are too much to deal with seek professional help. Sometime the stress of a divorce/separation becomes too painful to manage on our own. If your situation has become so stressful that you find yourself constantly sad or angry, you may need to see a professional counselor. In counseling, you may be able to openly express your feelings and may learn coping techniques.

## **The Games Parents Play**

### **The Mailman**

In this situation the parent uses the child to carry messages to the other parent. Mom and Dad find it difficult to communicate so the child is placed in the middle and has to serve as the message carrier. The child is asked to take a message from Mom to Dad and then back from Dad to Mom. Consider this case:

Deidra is five years old. Her parents have recently divorced. Mom and Dad try to communicate, but it always ends in a big fight. Both parents recognize that their arguing is making Deidra feel awful. Thus, Mom and Dad have decided to avoid each other as much as possible. Whenever Dad has something to say to Mom he sends a message with Deidra. Likewise, if Mom has a message for Dad, she sends it with Deidra. As a result, Mom and Dad have been arguing less.

Was this a good idea?

Why was this a good/not good idea?

Is Deidra happier now that her parents are arguing less?

What would you suggest that Deidra's parents should do?

### **The Secret Agent**

In this situation the child is expected to give parent information concerning the other parent. The child is prompted to constantly spy on the other parent. The child may be required to search financial documents, to take notice of who comes over to the home, or who is on the other end of the phone. Often times, the spying is concerned with romantic relationships. Consider this scenario:

Margaret is a nine year old girl. Margaret's mother suspected that her Dad was seeing someone new. Mom would talk about her suspicions when Margaret was around. She would have lengthy conversations on the phone with her friends explaining her suspicions and how she arrived at her conclusions. One day Margaret came to Mom with a phone number she retrieved from Dad's phone. Mom was very happy that she had the woman's number and was a step closer to finding the "mystery woman." A week later, Margaret came to Mom with a small piece of paper. On the paper was a sentence saying, "I love you more than life. You are my life." She had checked Dad's text messages and had written it down. Mom was happy because she now had evidence that he was romantically involved.

Did Dad do the right thing?

Did Mom do the right thing?

Did Margaret do the right thing?

Why did Margaret spy on Dad?

Did her Mom tell her to spy on Dad?

What would you have done differently?

## **The Hostage**

In this situation, the child is kept away from one parent. Usually, the child is kept away from the parent who he/she does not reside with. This may have been done by telling the parent not to pick the child up for scheduled visitations, taking the child out when the other parent is scheduled to pick up the child, or in extreme situations, making false accusations of child abuse. The child may also be “brainwashed” to view the other parent as a bad person. Why would a parent do this? A parent may keep the child away from the other parent because the separation was difficult and she/he feels as though they were treated unfairly. The child may also be kept away from the other parent because that parent refuses to pay, or was late paying, child support. Consider the following scenario:

Mark’s Mom did not receive the child support payments from Dad for the past two months. Mom spoke to Dad several times about sending the child support. She has expressed to him how important it is that she receives the funds. Dad said he would send the check as soon as possible but he has not. Mom has decided that if she does not get the check by this Friday, Mark will not be allowed to visit his Dad this weekend. Mark is hoping that the check arrives before Friday. He has been checking the mailbox every day.

Did Mom make the right decision?

Did Dad make the right decision?

How does Mark feel?

Who is being hurt?

Why is \_\_\_\_ being hurt?

## **The Therapist**

In this situation, the child has to comfort the parent. The parent may be experiencing emotional hardship and may need support. The parent begins to rely on the child to provide the support. The parent may cry in front of the child for hours, talk to the child about how sad he/she is, and even ask if the child feels the same way that he/she does. Consider the following scenario:

Lacey’s parents have been separated for a year. Lacey’s Mom has finally asked Dad for a divorce. Lacey has expressed to Mom that she is not happy and wants the family to reunite. Mom spoke to Lacey about the divorce and told Lacey that she was married to her father for a long time and has been sad for most of the time during the marriage. Mom told Lacey “I finally have a chance to be happy.” However, Lacey is still unhappy about the divorce. Mom is frustrated because Lacey does not want to be happy for her. Mom would like for Lacey to be more supportive of her and the entire process. She expects for Lacey, who is twelve, to be someone she can talk to about how unhappy she was during the marriage. Mom wants Lacey to be happy for her but Lacey refuses to be happy.

Should Lacey be “happy” for Mom?

Should Lacey be more supportive to her Mom and understand how sad she was during the marriage?

Is she responsible for making her Mom feel better about the divorce/separation?

Should Mom be talking to Lacey about her past marital issues?

If Mom needs someone to talk to, who should she talk to?

### **The Negotiator**

In this situation the child is asked to settle disputes between Mom and Dad. The child may negotiate in order to get something for himself/herself or the other parent. Sometimes children may negotiate issues such as parenting time and child support. Other times children may negotiate in order to get their parents back together. Consider this situation:

Desiree is a ten year old girl whose parents have been divorced for two years now. When Desiree visits Mom on the weekends they have a wonderful time. Mom usually has big plans including visiting the museum and going to the theme parks. Sometimes, Desiree talks to Mom about Dad. She also talks to Dad about Mom. Last month, Mom had a reduction in time at work. She does not have to work on Fridays anymore. She wants to spend more time with Desiree. She wants to pick her up on Fridays instead of Saturdays. She asks Desiree if she would like that. Desiree agrees that it is a great idea. Mom suggests that Desiree talks to her father about it.

Should Mom and Desiree spend more time together?

Is this arrangement fair to Dad?

Should Desiree tell Dad that she wants to spend more time with Mom?

Who should be responsible for telling Dad?

### **The Best Friend**

In this case the child becomes the parent's best friend. The parent may involve the child in adult conversations. If Mom is dating, she may talk to the child about her new relationship. A father may be interested in a certain lady and talks freely to his son about his affection. Consider the following case:

Janet is recently divorced. She has two daughters. Sarah is sixteen and Myrna is nineteen. The girls were going to a party at a friend's home. Seeing how sad their Mom was, Myrna invited her to the party. At first, Mom refused but Myrna and Sarah convinced her that she would be comfortable since two other Moms would be there. She finally accepted the invitation. Janet had a great time at the party. She met many people. She met a guy named Thomas. Thomas is twenty-two and he is very kind and responsible. Myrna and Sarah have known him for many years. Mom has been talking to Thomas on the phone everyday for two weeks now. She informs the girls that she is now dating Thomas and she thinks that she's in love with him. Myrna asks Mom to give her all the juicy details.

Was it acceptable for Janet to attend the party?



Is it fine for Janet to go out with her kids?  
Is it acceptable to date her daughters' friends?

## **Summary**

In most of these situations the child is fulfilling the role of an adult. Desiree's mom should not have asked her to talk to her father about increasing her parenting time. Mom should take on the responsibility of talking to dad. Likewise, Myrna should not be charged with carrying messages between mom and dad. Deidra's situation resulted in mom and dad arguing less. However, this is still an inappropriate task for Deidra to perform. If mom and dad need the help of someone else to communicate more effectively, then that person should be an agreed upon adult. Deidra should not be the person responsible for communication between her parents.

Margaret's mother never told her to spy on Dad. However, she did initiate the behavior by discussing the issue in front of Margaret. Margaret felt that she should do something to help her Mom. Mom's conversations with her friends on the phone should be more discreet. Mom should have told Margaret not to search Dad's phone without his permission. She should also explain to Margaret that these are adult issues and she does not want her to get involved. Margaret was hurt when she saw the message on Dad's phone. Mom never took the time to ask her how she felt. It may have been a good idea for Mom and Dad to have had a talk about what was going on. Then they both needed to sit down and have a discussion with Margaret letting her know that this was an adult issue and how much she means to both of them.

What is most troubling about most of these cases is that the child is now engaged in adult situations and conversations. For example, the child who serves as a "mailman" is responsible for getting the message correct. This is difficult because so much of what we say is based on body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Parents should take charge of the responsibility of talking to each other. Parents communicating with each other ensure that the correct message is delivered and takes the burden of responsibility off of the child. If you find it too difficult to talk to the other parent here are some creative ideas:

Write a letter and mail it

Send an email message

Send a message by phone text

Find a divorce professional who is experienced in helping parents to reduce conflict.

## Co-parenting

### What Makes a Good Co-Parent?

- Good co-parents make decisions concerning their child together, as a team.
- Good co-parents are able to put aside their differences for the benefit of their child/children.
- Good co-parents do not put their emotional needs above their parental responsibilities when making parenting decisions.
- Good co-parents are respectful toward each other.
- Good co-parents support their child's relationship with the other parent.
- Good co-parents do not use their children as secret agents or as weapons.
- Good co-parents speak positive about the other parent.
- Good co-parents share information with each other about their child's life including activities and education.
- Good co-parents make sure that the child/children know how to make contact with the other parent.
- Good co-parents adhere to the parenting plan.
- Good co-parents are able to compromise when necessary.
- Good co-parents set rules and discipline procedures for their child as a team.
- Good co-parents let each other know where, and with whom, their child will be at all times.

### Co-Parents Pledge

We will work together making sure that our child/children experience the best childhood possible.

We have learned positive skills such as compromising and communicating.

We are not perfect so we will make a few mistakes but as long as we focus on the best interest of our child/children we can overcome anything.

We have acknowledged that our children need both parents. We will continue to show them love, discipline, love and appreciation.

Our Children are Forever Precious.

## Parenting Plan

A parenting plan is a complete plan that includes a clear and understandable schedule of how the child/children will spend time with each parent. The schedule lists how weekdays, weekends, holidays, birthdays, vacation and other special days will be spent. It also contains who is accountable for school fees and health insurance. The plan also includes how each parent will be in touch with their child/children.

Decide how much time your child will spend with each parent on a weekly basis.

<b>DAYS</b>	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mom							
Dad							

Decide how holidays will be spent with each parent.

<b>HOLIDAYS</b>	Winter Holiday	Fall Holiday	Spring Holiday	Spring Break	Summer Vacation
Mom					
Dad					

Decide how much time your child will spend with each parent on special days.

<b>Special DAYS</b>	Child's Birthday	Dad's Birthday	Mom's Birthday	Father's Day	Mother's Day
Mom					
Dad					

Decide how your child will have their financial needs met. Child Support is based on the Florida Child Support Calculation Worksheet.

	Child Support	Health Care	School Fees	Allowance	Other
Mom					
Dad					

Decide how your child can make contact with each parent at anytime and all times. Please put phone numbers and email addresses in the appropriate fields below.

<b>Means</b>	Phone #	Job Phone #	Email	Relative/Friend Phone #	Address	Other
Mom						
Dad						

Decide how changes/conflict concerning the parenting plan will be resolved.

Teamwork	Mediation	Parenting Coordination	Court	Other

# **Legal Aspects of Divorce**

## **Going to Court**

When deciding issues concerning children it is best if both parents can make all of the decisions as a team. However, some parents will need help in facilitating the agreement process. Mediation can be utilized to assist parents in making these important decisions concerning their children and themselves. If all of the decisions are not agreed upon through mediation then parents will have to take the next step and go to court to have the judge decide for them.

## **Child Support**

Child support is money paid by both parents to meet the child's financial needs. Usually, the parent who the child lives with most of the time receives a periodic payment. Child support is not for the parent who receives the funds. Child support is intended to help to meet the child's financial needs. Child support is also based on the parent's income. Both mom and/or dad may be required to pay child support. In Florida there is a child support calculation worksheet. The worksheet takes the needs of the child such as, medical and educational needs, into consideration and the income of both parents. Unlike alimony, child support is not optional. Child support must be paid for children up to 18 years old. Not wanting to have contact or visitation with your child does not release you from your child support obligations. For more information on obtaining child support payments you may contact Child Support Enforcement at 1-800-622-KIDS (5437). Child support can be paid through Child Support Enforcement. Please note that each jurisdiction is unique and may have different rules concerning child support.

## **Alimony**

Alimony is money paid by one parent to the other parent. Alimony is based on the length of marriage, the difference in parents' income, and the ability to work. Alimony is not based on who caused the divorce. Florida is a no-fault state. Therefore, no one is blamed for the divorce. Alimony can be paid in a lump sum, for a specified period of time, or long term. Long term alimony may also be called full alimony. Full alimony is paid until one person passes or the payee remarries. Please note that if the payer remarries alimony is still to be paid.

## **Parenting coordination**

Parenting coordination offers parents a way to resolve conflict. In high conflict divorce/separation cases a judge may order parents to see a parenting coordinator (PC). In some instances parents will independently seek the services of a parenting coordinator to aid in resolving disputes. Court certified parenting coordinators are from the medical, mental health, and legal professions. All parenting court certified coordinators have at least a Master's Degree.

A parent coordinator's role is to assist parents in creating and implementing their parenting plan. A PC may provide parents with information and education including child development and

conflict resolution. A parenting coordinator may also offer recommendations and may also make limited decisions (with parents' and court's permission). A PC may also provide resources and referrals for parents.

### **What is Mediation?**

Family mediation is a process in which an impartial mediator facilitates the communication between two parents. The mediation procedure is set up to provide couples with a meaningful way of reaching a joint agreement that may avoid conventional court proceedings (litigation). Mediation is conducted by way of a conference. At the start of the meeting the mediator will explain the process to both parties involved. The mediator's job is to manage the process and help you to reach your own decision. The mediator should not make decisions (not act as a judge). Whatever is discussed in mediation is confidential. Attorneys are allowed to be present during the meeting with the mediator. If an agreement is reached by both parties, it will be drawn up and signed by both parties. Mediation agreements are legal documents. Changes can be made to the agreement using the modification process. Modification can be conducted by court proceedings or mediation.

### **Mediation vs. Litigation**

MEDIATION	LITIGATION
Confidential	Public Record
Informal	Formal
You take the lead	Attorneys lead
No witness needed	Usually witnesses
Focus on future	Focus on past
You decide outcome	Judge decides
Less hostility	More hostility
Less expensive	Costly
Short process	Lengthy process

### **Mediation Pledge**

I pledge to support the use of mediation because it is generally quick, inexpensive, and allows individuals and organizations control in resolving their disagreements.

*Taken from the Florida Dispute Resolution Center*

## **Resources**

### **MOVIES ABOUT DIVORCE FOR CHILDREN**

1. Taking the Duh Out of Divorce (2008)
2. The Parent Trap (1998)
3. Mrs. Doubtfire (1993)
4. Lemons 2 Lemonade (2005)
5. Stepmom (1998)

### **BOOKS ABOUT DIVORCE FOR CHILDREN**

1. Sophie's Castle (2005). Heather F. Levine, Illustrated by J.K. Drummond. New York: Sterling Publishing.
2. Daddy, Daddy Be There (1998). Candy Dawson Boyd & Floyd Cooper. London: Puffin Books.
3. Guess How Much I Love You (2008). Sam McBratney & Anita Jeram Illustrator. Somerville: Candlewick.
4. The Kissing Hand (2007). Audrey Penn. Terre Haute: Tanglewood Press.
5. When Sophia Gets Angry- Really, Really Angry ( 2004). Molly Bang. New York: Scholastic Paperbacks.
6. On Monday When It Rained (2001). Cherryl Kachenmeiste & Tom Berthiaume. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
7. Dinosaur Divorce (1988). Laurene Krasney Brown & Marc Brown. New York: Little, Brown Books For Young Kids, Hachette Book Group.
8. It's Not Your Fault, KoKo Bear (1997). Vicki Lansky. Deephaven: The Book Peddlers.
9. When Mom and Dad Divorce (1999). Menendez-Aponte. St. Meinrad: Abbey Press.

## **MOVIES ABOUT DIVORCE FOR ADULTS**

1. The War of the Roses (1989)
2. The Squid and the Whale (2005)
3. The First Wives Club (1996)
4. Stepmom (1998)
5. The Whole Nine Yards (2000)
6. Waiting to Exhale (1995)
7. Along Came Polly (2004)
8. Kramer vs. Kramer (1979)
9. The Story of Us (1999)
10. The Upside of Anger (2005)
11. One Fine Day (1996)
12. Why Did I Get Married (2007)
13. The First Wives Club (1996)
14. Just Add Spice (2010)

## **BOOKS ABOUT DIVORCE FOR ADULTS**

The Power of Positive Parenting (1994). Dr. Glenn I Latham. North Logan: P &T Parenting Prescriptions.

Caught In The Middle: Protecting The Children of High-Conflict Divorce (1994). Carla Garrity & Mitchell Baris. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce (2001). Judith Wallerstein, Julia M. Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee. New York: Hyperion.

Parenting Apart: How Separated and Divorced Parents Can Raise Happy and Secure Kids (2010). Christina McGhee. New York: Penguin Group.

Surviving the Breakup: How Children and Parents Cope with Divorce (1996). Judith Wallerstein and Joan B. Kelly. New York: Basic Books.

Vicki Lansky's Divorce Book For Parents: Helping Your Children Cope With Divorce and Its Aftermath (2005). Vicki Lansky. Minnetonka: Book Peddlers.

Cooperative Parenting and Divorce Parents Guide (1999). Susan Blyth Boyan. Atlanta: Active Parenting Publishers.

The Co-Parenting Survival Guide: Letting Go of Conflict After a Difficult Divorce (2001). Elizabeth Thayer. Oakland, New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Divorce and the Special Need Child: A Guide For Parents (2010). Margaret Price. Philadelphia: Jessica Kinsley Publishers.

Divorce, Family Structure, and the Academic Success of Children (2002). William Jeynes. Binghamton: The Haworth Press.

The Everything Parent's Guide To Children And Divorce: Reassuring Advice to Help Your Family Adjust (2005). Carl E. Pickhardt. Avon: Adams Media.

Adjusting To Divorce: Simple Steps Parents Can Take To Help Themselves and Their Children (2009). Dr. Percy Ricketts. Pembroke Pines: Counseling & Empowerment Consulting Group.

## **DIVORCE INFORMATION WEBSITES**

[www.divorcecare.org](http://www.divorcecare.org)

[http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/home\\_family/divorce.html](http://kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/home_family/divorce.html)

[http://www.flcourts.org/gen\\_public/adr/](http://www.flcourts.org/gen_public/adr/)

<http://www.uptoparents.org/>

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children\\_divorce.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children_divorce.htm)

<http://www.divorceabc.com/html/intro.htm>

[http://www.flcourts.org/gen\\_public/family/self\\_help/legal\\_aid.shtml](http://www.flcourts.org/gen_public/family/self_help/legal_aid.shtml)

<http://beautyindifferences.com/>



<http://www.domesticviolence.org/>

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child\\_abuse\\_physical\\_emotional\\_sexual\\_neglect.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/child_abuse_physical_emotional_sexual_neglect.htm)

<http://www.kidsmatterinc.org/>

## **NATIONAL RESOURCES**

Child Abuse Hotline	800-96-ABUSE
Children with Disabilities	800-695-0285
Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at	800-4-A-CHILD
Dept. of Human Services	877-KIDSNOW
Domestic Violence Hotline	800-799-SAFE
Guardian Ad Litem Program	800-280-9262
Parents Anonymous	800-554-2323
US Dept. of Education	800-US-LEARN

## **REFERENCES**

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## Notes