

The effect of divorce on children

[Family](#), [Divorce](#)



The Effect of Divorce on Children Abstract The present studies will show how the statistics of divorce and children involved in a divorce have dramatically decreased over the past 35 years (US Census Bureau, 2004). The emotional stresses of living situations prior to, during, and after a divorce between parents and their children, as well as, the behavioral issues that may occasionally be found during these difficult times are important as to determining the developmental crises that may ensue (Levine, 1995). This paper will explore the findings of the variety of feelings that children go through during this change (Levine, 1995). Several statistical theories regarding parental involvement as well exist and these theories may provide information about the cause of a child's emotional retraction (Marquardt, 2005). Information will be included on how the impact affects a child and ways to help make these transitions easier. The Effect of Divorce on Children " One out of every two marriages today ends in divorce and many divorcing families include children. " (Vollmer, 2010) What this means for the children of the divorcing families is that their security is being threatened and they are uncertain of what is to come. A divorce for any child no matter the age is going to have some sort of negative effect psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally. In order to understand the effect of any divorce on a child we must first understand the steps leading up to what occurs prior to the divorce proceedings within a family unit. This paper will examine the changes within the family, including the child's emotions, the stress on the children caused by the divorce, habit changes as well as different ways to combat excessive negative changes prior during and after the divorce is finalized. For anyone going through a divorce the emotional pain and stress

can be overwhelming for all parties. Studies have been conducted by one Dr. Youngmin Sun who over two years studied over 10, 000 children to which 8% had experienced divorce in their family (Hartill, 2001). The findings show that the relationships within the family tend to being as much as two years prior to any separation or divorce in a home (Levine, 1995). As a result, the strained relationships between parents have a tremendous impact on the child's life. The child, including those around them may observe the parents lack of involvement in their child's life when it comes to school or other activities (Hartill, 2001). Children have the ability to adapt to any change on the grounds that they are spoken to about any issues that are creating discord in the home. One important fact is that the parents do not remain together for the child's benefit (Ungar Ph. D., 2010), because this could potentially make matters worse in the whole. Our goal is to remove them from the tumultuous situation as best possible while including the child in your decisions. Prior to any divorce there are many different types of emotions that can run through a child. The emotions can run anywhere from anger to despair (Levine, 1995). Each of the different emotions can have a lasting negative impact on the child. Often time's parents become so discontent with their lives that they completely forget about the children and will even go as far as pulling the unintended victims into their battles, whether it be involving them in arguments with the other parent or in a parents addiction (Levine, 1995). This behavior causes, in many cases, anger not at the child, but at the parents for erroneously putting them in a position that they should not have to deal with due to a parent's ignorance of their child's needs which in some ways may cause them to feel guilty (Levine,

1995). As parents it is imperative to recognize what is going on in order to avoid your child feeling guilty or afraid to be left alone. The child may begin to blame themselves for issues surrounding their parent's behaviors or decisions (Levine, 1995). Most children are completely unfamiliar with life outside of what they have lived with their entire lives, no matter how old the child is they will always wonder and often times fear what may happen (Levine, 1995). With each age group from infants to adolescents children may have a variety of reactions to divorce. This could include Loss of appetite, regression to infant behaviors, grief and sadness, rejection, and even attempting control (Debord Ph. D., 1997). These reactions are all different ways that a child may choose to show their dissatisfaction or confusion with the current circumstances whether it is arguments or a parents leaving due to a separation. Though infants lack understanding of the changes that are happening around them they do have the ability to sense and react to changes in a parent's energy (Debord Ph. D., 1997). Toddlers and preschoolers understand that a parent is no longer home, the difficulty for a toddler is attempting to grasp why it is that they are gone (Debord Ph. D., 1997). Early elementary, preteen and adolescents all understand what divorce is, but preteens and adolescents refuse to accept the divorce (Debord Ph. D., 1997). Preteens and adolescents will attempt to do whatever they can to bring their families together again. It is important to talk to any child about the separation or divorce that is occurring in the home and to allow them to express their fears and feelings towards the situation. (Hartill, 2001) Though it may be difficult to determine how to start the conversations there are many effective ways to help your child

regardless of age understand. Children need to understand that they are not alone in these difficult situations and that their mother and father will always be there for them and always love them, but that their mother and father cannot live together any more. They also must be reassured that they did not cause the divorce. Many children will go from the beginning of the divorce proceeding through to the end thinking that if only they had done something different their parent's would still be together (Debord Ph. D., 1997). Even though during the pre-divorce period is the peak of stress on a child, during the divorce process can sometimes be almost as stressful. The child continues through a variety of changes whether it is a different living situation schedule, going to a new school, continuing conflict between parents, or even changes in routine. Each age group would be affected differently. Infants, other than the poor appetite and upset stomach, may experience less turmoil with the changes due to the child growing up in the new living situation, where as a preschooler may cling even stronger to items like a security blanket or toys (Douglas, 2006). Preschoolers may tend to regress from progress that they had accomplished earlier due to the stress of the separation and then divorce, including the fear that they may become abandoned by both parents rather than just one (Douglas, 2006). School-aged children often times are too young to manage their emotions causing disruptions at home and in school due to feeling rejected by the parent who left. In many cases it is this child joining either school activities or participating in community activities that may encourage them by helping them cope with their situation (Douglas, 2006). Adolescents will experience an exponential range of emotions when it comes to the changes in their life.

Even a sense of responsibility may become a part of their life in order to regain some sort of stability (Douglas, 2006). Adolescents will in some cases push themselves into adulthood for the stability that their parents are no longer able to provide for them, yet they still so desperately need. The stresses associated with a divorce vary from child to child, but the most common is the loss of attachment. The child will cling to family such as a particular parent, brother, sister or pets. They will also at some times suffer anxiety due to the stress of being away from familiar things such as toys or their bedroom. Divorce can also produce another stressful event for a child especially if the child is used to always having at least one parent available and has never been to a child care. The amount of time that a parent needs to work in order to care for their family consequently after a divorce has increased from 51% up to 73%, it is at this point that a child is either thrust into a child care program or is left to care for themselves when before they had the support of their parents (Levine, 1995). This drastic change to a child's norm would potentially lead to increased anxiety and frustration of their situation. After the divorce is completed there are many different situations that result from the court decisions. The child must deal with a parent disappearing from their life at least partially, if not completely. In order to make this transition easier on a child both parents must continue to be influential components of their child's life. Whether the parents get along mutually or not they must develop a plan to keep the structure of their now separate family structure together (Divorce Source, INC, 1996). Parents must also understand that there must now be other ways of establishing routines around birthdays and holidays, expressly because dealing with birthdays and

holidays without the collective family as a whole will not be easy on the child in the beginning (Divorce Source, INC, 1996). By making these transitions easy on the child there will be a noticeable difference on the trauma of the events (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). The most considerable amount of damage is the divorce itself, but to make matters worse when the parents are unable to jointly co-exist with the custody of their children there are some cases where one parent will disappear from the child's life all together. In many situations it is done because the parents are not too hurt to face the other or attempts to sabotage the others attempts to visit (Levine, 1995). One way that parents are attempting to minimize the stress of a divorce is by participating in what has recently been fashioned as " Bird Nesting" (Marquardt, 2005). Bird nesting would be a great intention if it were as easy to keep up as it sound. When parents decide to bird nest they are choosing to allow their children to live in one house all the time while the parents move in and out from the children's house to another house or apartment (Marquardt, 2005). This can be financially taxing on both parties and is typically more unstable than if the parent's would have stayed married to begin with (Marquardt, 2005). Bird nesting normally does not last more than a few years before this fact becomes a reality. This time of transition is going to be an emotional rollercoaster for most and will be going through what is known as the crisis years (Levine, 1995). This takes place typically during the first two years after the divorce is finalized. The child's routine will be unpredictable and their support system will be minimal in many cases due to their parent's anxiety that they will not be able to provide appropriately for their children's needs (Levine, 1995). The children become overburdened with having to put

their parent's first and taking on the roll of caregiver, thus having to grow up well before their time and take care of their parent's, sibling's and even themselves while their custodial parent tries to pull themselves together. The most upsetting side of being an overburdened child is when neither of the parents is able to exist together in the same area. They will attempt to find any way possible to make their ex miserable, whether they use their children as bullets shooting insult at each other through their kid's or they are thrown into the mix sent as spies to get dirt on the other parent so that another conflict can ensue (Levine, 1995). Parents get so wrapped up in these situations that they are unable to see the damage that they are doing to their children. This damage in many cases will lead to the child having to make an unwilling choice of which parent they love more or even to the extent of distancing themselves from both parents altogether in order to alleviate the stresses placed upon them (Levine, 1995). Even with the divorce rates decreasing dramatically from what it has been from the 1970's when it was 37. 0% (US Census Bureau, 2004)to what it is today at 3. 5% (National Vital Statistics System, 2009) children are still effected every day and whether their parents are married or not, there are many parents that are taking advantage of cohabitations rather than marriage so as to avoid the additional stresses of marriage, children will continue to suffer from the stresses and varied emotions caused by divorce or separation in their family. As parents it is important to be aware of what is going on around your child and what your child has begun to recognize especially when it comes to division within a family. Any adjustment from a divorce can take time, but if the child is cared for consistently with little disruption to their normal routine

their transition will be considerably less stressful. In conclusion, there are many different ways to help your child remain minimally effected by a divorce. It is very important to break any news of a divorce together so that the child is able to hear the same thing from both parents so as to understand that it is not their fault, but that the parents are not able to live together anymore (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). Children need to know that they are loved and what changes are going to happen to them, but they don't need to know all the details this will just put more stress on them that they can't handle at this point (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). They need to be able to ask any questions that they may have (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). Being able to ask questions will help any child be able to understand what is going on and give them at least some time to be able to adapt to the changes that are going to take place instead of them just coming out of nowhere. There are many books out that speak of divorce and the changes that happen. By reading these books to your child they may be able to relate better to the feelings that are going on within them and express themselves more clearly eliminating the need for negative behavior (Debord Ph. D., 1997). It is always beneficial for a child going through a divorce to be able to remain in the same house, school, or neighborhood whenever possible in order to minimize the child's fear of being abandoned or left behind with no support (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). If the child is in need of both parent's it is important for both parents to be available whether it be for a school play or even a meeting with teachers (Ungar Ph. D., 2010). Whether the parents get along or not the child is still their child and still needs them. If possible keep the child on a similar routine no matter which parent they are with, minimizing household

confusion is key to making the transition easier. Divorce is never easy on anyone. It is important to ensure that parents are completely aware of the consequences that a divorce will bring to their child's life and prepare for how to ensure a minimal intrusion that this change will cause. Be vigilant and take the steps necessary to secure any assistance necessary for the child's mental well-being so as to prevent them from being emotionally destroyed during an unfortunate process.

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