

Outline of Divorce Presentation

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Losses Involved In Separation/Divorce

- Grief around the loss of the family unit
- Grief around loss of a particular quality of parent-child relationship with the parent becomes distraught
- Grief around the partial or complete loss of a relationship with the parent who moves out of the home
- Grief around the partial loss of a close relationship with the custodial parent who increase her work efforts, becomes involved in a serious dating relationship, or remarries.
- Grief around the loss of contact with the family members (knowing these people are there but inaccessible)
- Loss of home, possessions, standard of living
- Loss of social network
- Loss of self esteem, capability, coping ability

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*"I'm having my wedding ring melted
down into a bullet."*

Parenting...

...is always a hazardous undertaking. Much of the time it is like climbing a mountain trail that disappears and reappears, making you wonder if you are still headed for the top or if you're stranded on a cliff. But parenting in a divorce or remarried family is harder-it's like climbing that same trail in a blizzard, blinded by emotions and events out of your control. You have no clear path, no idea of where you're going. You may not even realize that you're lost.

(Wallerstein, J, Et al, 2003)

Ex Spouse Relationships

- **“Perfect Pals”** - A small group of divorced spouses whose failed marriage has not overshadowed a longstanding friendship. They share decision making, child rearing, holiday, extended family relationships; occasional conflicts are outweighed by a genuine fondness and attempt to accommodate one another
- **“Cooperative Colleagues”** - Larger Group
Not good friends yet able to work well on issues concerning the children. Have conflict. Manage it well. Ability to separate conflicts as spouses from parental duties, “ups and downs”; children’s welfare paramount . Desire to minimize trauma for their kids.
- **“Angry Associates”** - Adversarial battle at the time of decisive separation. Little direct contact. Custodial parent closely controls ex spouses access to children
- **“Fiery Foes”** - Feel nothing but fury for ex spouse. No capacity for cooperation. Cling to a sense outrage. Still very much attached (negatively) to one another although they deny it. Power struggle pervades the entire family. Children caught in the middle. One parent usually the father may see the children less and less frequently over the years Both parents blame the other for the decline in contact
- **“Dissolved Duos”** - Divorced spouses after the separation/divorce discontinue any contact with each other. **“Single parent family”** the former spouse is completely absent, except in the memories or fantasies
 - Constance Ahrons (longitudinal study 1978, University of Wisconsin, NIMH, 98 divorced couples)

The eight primary emotions or reactions patterns of divorced children

- **Children's reaction to separation/divorce**
 - **Disbelief**
 - **Fear**
 - **Panic**
 - ***Anger**
 - ***Confusion**
 - ***Sadness**
 - **Grief**
 - **Guilt**
 - **Experiencing the loss of control over a parent's behavior**
 - **Feeling Sadness**
 - **Being disappointed in parents**
 - **Feeling ashamed or embarrassed**
 - **Feeling the parent's will stop loving you**
 - **Being angry**
 - **Feeling guilty**
 - **Blaming one parent**
- The Boy's and Girl's Book About Divorce (Gardner 1971)

Children's reactions to divorce are not necessarily the same as the effects of divorce on children

- **Acknowledge that the divorce is real, that it is happening or happened**
- **Disengage from the parents conflicts so that they can go on with age appropriate pursuits**
- **Resolving the loss that has occurred, such as the loss of a family member from daily participation in the family like and feelings of rejection**
- **Resolve anger and self blame for the divorce**
- **Accepting the permanence of the divorce**
- **Achieving realistic hope regarding their future relationships**

» Wallerstein (1983): Six physiological tasks children need to master

Research

- **Boys tend to fare less well than girls**
 - » (Hetherington et al. 1985)
- **Younger children are more vulnerable than older children to the negative consequences of divorce. However, children in later latency (9 and 10) tend to show a greater disruption in school performance than do children at other age levels**
 - » (Kanoy and Cunninghame 1984, Wallerstein and Kelly 1984, Tedder et al. 1987)
- **Continued parental conflict is correlated with poorer adjustment for children**
 - » (Chess et al. 1983, Guidubaldi et al. 1986, Kurdek and Siessky 1980, Wallerstein 1985)

Research (Continued)

- **Post divorce stability (financial and geographic) is correlated with better adjustment for children**
 - » (Hodges et al. 1979, Koch 1982, Lowerey and Settle 1985, Scherman and Lepak 1986)
- **Mental health of the custodial parent is correlated with better adjustment in children**
 - » (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980)
- **A continuing relationship with the noncustodial parent is correlated with positive adjustment in children**
 - » (Wallerstein and Kelly 1980)

Divorce is not genetic

But

Perhaps it is because of lack of faith or fear of hurt that children of divorce are less committed to commitment when they grow up. Deciding to marry, they are more likely to divorce than adult children of parents between whom the commitment to stay married was kept. Divorce can teach that it is easier to walk away from hard times than to stay and work through them. Most children of divorce have issues about trust in commitment to resolve in their adult caring relationships.

Its Never Too Late

- **Share conversations with older children**
- **Educate them about your mistakes**
- **Let adult children know how much you hope they can make better marriages succeed where you stumbled**
- **Kids need to understand that an unhappy marriage is not a random natural disaster but the result of human error that they can avoid**



Alert!

Divorced partners must commit to “remarry” as parents for the sake of their common interest in the children—so important information can be shared, so major decisions can be deliberated, so visitation arrangements can be made. Still “married” in this sense, they must learn to manage the mix of payoffs, costs, and risks with each other in their divorced relationship to keep it working well. As before, a compromise will be the best that they can achieve.

Divorce Is Not The End Of
The Line.

It Is The End of A Marriage
And The Beginning Of A New
Phase Of Life