

# **SMILE: An educational program for separating and divorced parents with minor children**

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# INTRODUCTION

This booklet is for separating and divorced parents, and has three goals:

1. To provide information to help parents better understand the effects and impacts of divorce and separation;
2. To help parents understand the needs of their children during this life changing event and after;
3. To promote children's healthy adjustment to divorce and separation.

The information has been drawn from the experience of the developers of the SMILE program and other professionals in the field of divorce, counseling and co-parenting. Because each family situation, and therefore divorce and separation, are unique, readers are encouraged to consult with other services available to divorced parents and their children. These include psychological services, legal services, parent support groups, emergency services, family court mediation services, conflict resolution and mediation agencies, and books or articles relating to divorce, separation and co-parenting. Suggested readings, as well as resources, are listed at the back of this booklet.

## THE SMILE PROGRAM

Each year over a million marriages end in divorce in the United States. When divorce happens, people feel alone and wonder how anyone else lived through it. SMILE (Start Making It Livable for Everyone) is a program for separating and divorced parents with minor children.

The developers of this program have worked with hundreds of divorcing families having difficulties with time sharing, parenting roles and other divorce-related issues. This program will provide some information about the effects of divorce and what parents can do to make the post-divorce and post-separation periods livable.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# ABOUT DIVORCE & SEPARATION

**Divorce and Separation Bring Change.** Every family member must adapt to a new way of living. The more parents know about divorce and separation, the better they are able to cope with the changes and help their children adjust.

**Divorce and Separation Are Painful.** Children feel hurt and helpless when parents divorce and separate. They are emotionally attached to both parents, and most children want their parents to stay together. When divorce and separation occur, children, as well as parents, go through a grieving process which engenders feelings of disbelief, anger, sadness and depression. Children experience a number of losses, including the loss of important relationships with family members and friends, changes in environment, loss of traditions established by the intact family, and loss of what the children themselves were like before the breakup of the family.

Parents experience hurt and helplessness from what happened during the marriage and relationship, events that occurred at the time of separation, what caused the separation, and the divorce process itself. Divorce and separation are extremely difficult times for each parent, and the parents tend to blame each other for problems. They sometimes do and say terrible things to each other and are unaware of the negative impact their behavior has on children.

Legal aspects of divorce and separation may be easier to deal with than the emotional upheaval of divorce and the feelings that arise from the death of a relationship. Anger, disappointment, hurt, grief and a desire for revenge are some normal reactions. Emotional turmoil can interfere with the mom and dad roles even though the husband and wife (or boyfriend and girlfriend) roles have ended.

**How Children Come Through the Divorce and Separation.** Children's responses to a divorce or separation are due in large measure to the parents' relationship after the divorce or separation and the parents' relationships with their children. Parents' attitudes and actions make a big difference in how children adjust to the divorce. Parents may not remain friends after the divorce. However, they can successfully co-parent and raise their children if the parents are civil and business-like in their dealings with each other, and promote positive relationships with their children.

# HOW DIVORCED & SEPARATED PARENTS FEEL

When parents separate or divorce, it may take months or years for feelings to change. While the process can be different for each person, most people gradually pass through several stages. The middle stages may occur in any order, and some people may deal with the issues more than once.

## **Denial**

In the beginning, the person may not be able to believe that the marriage or relationship is over. Denial protects against shock. It insulates the person from fear about the loss of the relationship and the feelings of rejection, loneliness and depression. Some people react by becoming withdrawn and isolated, and others become highly active to block out the pain.

## **Bargaining**

The person tries to think of ways that the relationship may be saved. A parent may ask the other parent to become involved in counseling, to stop engaging in some behavior or to participate in activities together. Some people may make a deal with themselves to do something they believe will save the marriage or help them overcome the loss of the relationship.

## **Anger**

The person starts to realize that his or her needs have not been met in the relationship. Anger surfaces, and the person may be mad at himself/herself, or the former partner.

## **Depression**

When the person begins to admit that the separation or end to the relationship is permanent, grief at the loss of the relationship is common. Fear about being alone and on one's own surfaces, and these feelings can drain a person and make it difficult to think positively about the future.

## **Acceptance**

In time, the person usually begins to feel better and adjusts to the changes. Anger, grief and guilt dissolve, and the person is better able to focus on the future. Life becomes stable and hope emerges.

# HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEMSELVES

Parents face a number of problems when they divorce or separate. These events bring them into new situations for which they may not have solutions. Some problems and how to handle them include the following scenarios.

**BEING ON ONE'S OWN** – After years of marriage and togetherness, loneliness may set in. Activities that once brought enjoyment may no longer be interesting. Parents may feel isolated. It helps to establish new patterns that make one feel better.

## **WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- Visit friends and family often, talk to them on the phone, do activities with them.
- Become involved in a support group to talk about problems and solutions, or attend counseling.
- Expect that there will be times when nothing seems to be going right, but remember that things usually get better.
- Develop new interests or hobbies – take classes, do volunteer work, join organizations, or exercise.
- Make new friends.

**HAVING LESS TIME FOR THE CHILDREN** – During separation and divorce, parents are trying to cope with changed and increased responsibilities and being on their own. This is also a time when the children need more affection and attention. There is often too little of the parents to go around.

## **WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- Ask family and friends for assistance.
- Be sure that each child has special attention and time. Find an activity that both the parent and child can enjoy.
- Leave or send notes of love and appreciation to the children. Hide them in lunch boxes or in their overnight bags.
- Ask friends or neighbors to help with child care or exchange child care with them.
- Attend counseling or join a support group. Have the children participate in counseling if appropriate.
- Use lists to organize activities.

**TAKING CARE OF THE HOME** – Whether the children live with a parent most of the time or a smaller part of the time, being a single parent is a challenge. The demands of a job and meeting the needs of the children are a burden for one adult. Household chores may seem like the last straw.

**WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- Let some things go or change regular routines to adjust to the demands.
- Divide the chores and let the children be responsible for taking care of possessions and their own rooms.
- Look into the possibility of using a cleaning service to help handle the chores.
- Allow the children to contribute to family problem solving.

**HANDLING MONEY PROBLEMS** – After the divorce or separation, two separate homes must be maintained. Previously, there may have been two incomes, and now there is only one. It is often hard to make ends meet.

**WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- Look for free or inexpensive activities and entertainment.
- Make a budget and stick to it.
- Get financial counseling if necessary.
- Before starting a second family, remember obligations to the first family.
- Find out about assistance programs – Medicaid, Food Stamps, etc.

**BALANCING PERSONAL TIME AND CHILDREN'S NEEDS** – At some point, parents may want to begin socializing and meeting new people. It makes life more enjoyable and makes it easier to handle problems. Children may feel left out, confused, or angry.

**WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

- Let the children know that they are loved and that parents as well as children need time to do things they enjoy.
- Do not expose children to casual relationships. If a serious relationship develops, introduce that person slowly into the children's lives.
- Include the children in a social activity that everyone can enjoy.

# HOW CHILDREN OF DIVORCE & SEPARATION FEEL

Divorce is painful for children. The effects of divorce and separation vary with children's ages and depend on the circumstances surrounding the relationship's end. While every child is different and may react in different ways, there are some common reactions by age group that parents may see.

**YOUNG CHILDREN** – Preschool aged children live in a small world mostly made up of parents and family. They have not had many experiences, and react to what is happening in an emotional way and cannot understand the divorce or separation on an intellectual level. The end of their parents' relationship is confusing and young children may be afraid that they will be abandoned or have nowhere to live. They cry, cling to parents or become demanding. They may even blame themselves for the breakup and feel guilty.

**ELEMENTARY AGE CHILDREN** – Children ages 5 through 12 are expanding their world to include peers and school friends rather than just family. They react to what is happening by thinking about it and questioning the changes. They worry about many things and believe in living by rules and that life is fair. Children in this age group deeply feel the loss of the family when the divorce or separation happens. Loyalty conflicts are common, and children may respond by feeling abandoned and insecure. Because of the loss of one parent, they fear that something will happen to the parent with whom they live most of the time. Problems at school and with friends may surface. Younger children in this age group often feel very sad at the breakup of the family while the older children may harbor deep anger.

**YOUNG TEENAGERS** – Young teenagers are in a stage where they are going through rapid physical, social and emotional growth. Often they are confused, moody and feel insecure. At times they may act like a little child by clinging, being needy, or demanding to parents. Other times they reject their parents and attach to friends. When parents divorce or separate, early adolescents have more stress, resulting in their feeling rejected, ashamed or angry at their parents, which camouflages their sense of vulnerability. Problems with sleeping, health, school or friends may arise. When parents vie for their allegiance, loyalty conflicts result in guilt, depression or despair.

**OLDER TEENAGERS** – This stage may be the stormiest for the parent and child relationships. Older teenagers are trying on different roles and in the process of establishing their identities. Divorce and the end of their parents' relationship may make teenagers feel hurried to achieve independence when they are not ready, and they become overwhelmed by unsolvable problems and feelings of incompetence. Teenagers may test their parents' concern for them, and play one parent against the other. This age group may become preoccupied with the survival of relationships and mourn the loss of the family of their childhood. They feel embarrassed and resentful toward parents who are perceived as giving their own needs priority.

Common reactions of children to separation – some reactions may overlap age groups.

<b>AGE GROUP</b>	<b>COMMON REACTIONS</b>
<b>BABIES AND TODDLERS</b>	Trouble sleeping Afraid to leave parent; clingy Crankiness Crying Slowing down in learning new skills
<b>CHILDREN AGES 3-5 YEARS</b>	Blame selves for separation and feel guilty Confusion Fear of abandonment Aggression, temper tantrums Return to security items Lapses in toilet training Try to convince selves everything is alright Emotionally needy
<b>CHILDREN AGES 6-8 YEARS</b>	Sadness Crying and sobbing Feel abandoned and rejected Loyalty conflicts Sense of helplessness Hope parents reconcile Anger
<b>CHILDREN AGES 9-12 YEARS</b>	Deep anger Physical complaints Sense of loss Shame Resentment Fear of loneliness Divided loyalties Anger toward the parent they blame for the breakup
<b>TEENAGERS</b>	Feelings of betrayal Anger Embarrassment Resentment Difficulty concentrating Chronic fatigue May feel hurried to achieve independence May be overly dependent May test parents' concern for them May align with one parent Worry about survival or relationships Worry over their future marriage Money concerns

# HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN

Divorce and separation often result in children being overwhelmed by the losses and changes they are experiencing. It takes time to adjust, and the time needed varies from child to child. Parents can help their children cope with divorce and the separation of the family.

## **CHILDREN NEED PREDICTABILITY**

- Children who can maintain regular routines are less likely to be overwhelmed by the changes divorce and separation bring. Parents should do their best to build and maintain healthy and smooth environments at both homes.
- Children need frequent and regular contact with both parents.
- Children need continued contact with friends and relatives of both parents.
- Children need personal space to call their own.
- Parents should exercise caution when introducing new boyfriends or girlfriends to children. Children often feel confused about their sense of loyalty, and parents' casual relationships may contribute to children's sense of insecurity and instability.

## **CHILDREN NEED RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH PARENTS**

- A parent needs to stress the good points about the other parent and avoid name calling, saying bad things, or blaming the other parent for problems.
- A parent should keep family photos available, including photos of the other parent.
- A parent should allow children to express their love for the other parent and talk about their experiences with the other parent.
- If the children complain about one parent, the other parent should encourage the children to take the complaint to the person responsible rather than agree with the children. A parent has no control over the other parent.
- A parent should encourage the other parent's involvement in the children's school or other activities and advise of parent/teacher conferences, provide report cards and give other information pertaining to the well-being of the children.
- A parent should assist children in buying cards and gifts for the other parent.
- Parents should telephone, email, write, send videos, utilize technology such as video calls, and send cards if they are not able to see their children regularly.

## **CHILDREN SHOULD BE KEPT OUT OF THE MIDDLE**

- Parents should talk directly to each other about child related information that they need to discuss, outside of the child's presence. If talking is not possible, communicate in writing. Children should not be used as messengers.
- A parent should not ask the children what goes on in the other parent's home. This is a violation of the children's trust.
- Parents should not argue in front of the children. Parents should manage their feelings, and if they cannot, they should end the conversation until they can do so.
- Parents should never expect or encourage their children to take sides.
- If children tell a parent that the other parent lets them stay up late or lets them eat sweets for dinner, a parent should tell the children that they must follow the rules of the household and that the other parent cannot be told what to do in his/her home.
- A parent should not withhold the children from the other parent or refuse to pay child support. Children should not be used as weapons to get back at the other parent.
- Parents should be on time for the exchange of children for parenting time. This sets a good example for the children and does not disrupt their routine.
- Parents should use common courtesy and be civil and business-like in their dealings with each other.
- Parents should not jump to conclusions before getting all the information.
- A parent should not compare children unfavorably with the other parent.
- A parent should not expect children to take the place of the absent parent or depend on the children for emotional support. Children need to be children.
- Parents should follow up agreements, in writing, about vacation dates, trips to the doctor or dentist, and changes in parenting time to avoid confusion and double scheduling.
- Parents should negotiate with one another about changes in parenting time or responsibilities for the children that each parent will assume. Negotiation requires compromise by both parents.

- Parents should recognize that as children grow and develop, parenting time and the parents' responsibilities may have to change to meet the changing needs of the children.

### **COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT**

- Parents should tell the children about the divorce or separation together if possible.
- Children need to know, sometimes over and over, how they will be affected by the parents' breakup, where they will go to school, where they will live, when they will see the other parent, friends and relatives, and who will take care of them if something happens to the other parent.
- Children need reassurance that they are not to blame for the divorce.
- Parents should answer children's questions honestly while avoiding unnecessary details.
- Parents should discuss divorce related issues in terms the children can understand. It is helpful to avoid terms such as "custody" and "visitation."
- Parents should encourage children to talk about the separation and their feelings, and discuss problems openly. Parents should be an emotional support for their children but should not rely on their children to be their emotional support.
- Parents need to accept children's mood swings and emotional outbursts and not take them personally. Counseling or support groups may help children resolve their feelings.
- Children should be helped to accept the reality of the divorce and not be given false hope of a reunion.
- Parents should not allow their past conflicts to interfere with present decisions regarding children.
- Parents should approach single parenting with a positive attitude and speak encouragingly about the future. Children need to know that a parent is strong and is going to take care of them.
- Parents should express their love and commitment to the children to help them feel secure.

Children's adjustment to divorce and separation depends on how parents handle the matter. Parents are role models for children and need to set a good example for them. Children imitate the behaviors and attitudes of their parents. When parents are able to

set aside their anger and resentment toward the other parent and handle the divorce in a mature and positive way, children benefit and are assisted in making a healthy adjustment to the divorce. The greatest gift divorced parents can give their children is to allow them to have a loving, satisfying relationship with both parents and not expose them to continued conflict and hostility.

*\*Schools often offer support groups and other supportive services for children dealing with divorce and separation. Inquire with your child's school counselor or school social worker.*

# PARENTING TIME

Though divorce has ended a marriage, or separation has ended a relationship, parenting remains. Children will begin to adjust and heal more readily after the breakup if cooperative parenting is established.

Each case is unique in that some parents may share equal parenting time, or one parent may be primarily responsible for the care and maintenance of the children. Parenting time is either defined by a court order or is agreed upon by both parents.

At first, parenting time may seem to complicate an already stressful situation. Divorced parents may find that their roles and expectations are undefined and cloudy. It takes time, effort, and planning on the part of both parents to be able to provide a safe environment that helps children recover from the divorce and feel good about themselves. Below are some guidelines and suggestions to facilitate parenting time.

**BEING CONSISTENT** – It is crucial that parents are regular and consistent about parenting time. Children need to know that they will be made available for parenting time and will be picked up and returned at scheduled times. If an emergency arises that requires a change in parenting time, or if parenting time will not be exercised, each parent has the responsibility of notifying the other parent as far in advance as possible.

The children should be supplied with adequate clothing for parenting time, and that clothing is to be returned at the end of parenting time. Each parent is also expected to have necessary items for the child at his or her house. If the children are on medication, the medication, dosage and times it is to be taken should be made available to both parents. Any information which pertains to the welfare of the children should be shared by the parents.

**GOING BETWEEN HOUSEHOLDS** – Children may complain, become withdrawn, or act out when it is time to go between the parents' homes. A parent may believe that something negative is happening in the other parent's home because of the children's behavior. This behavior is usually normal and not necessarily an indication that anything is wrong. Children may be involved in an activity that they don't want to interrupt. Children miss the parent they are not with and go through an adjustment when getting ready to leave each parent's home.

**REBUILDING TRUST** – It is essential that divorced parents make efforts to rebuild trust between themselves. Having a degree of trust helps reduce conflicts. One way to rebuild trust is to honor agreements made between parents. Broken agreements result in anger, disappointment, resentment and retaliation. Parents need to tell each other the truth. If plans need to be changed or something of concern happens during the time the children are with a parent, the situation should be discussed calmly with the other parent. A parent should verify children's stories with the other parent and recognize that children are not always accurate in their portrayal of events.

**SHARING AND PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVITIES** – Because of the newness of the divorce or separation and the changes in roles, it is helpful to outline a list of specific activities for parenting time. Choose activities that are appropriate to children’s ages and interests. Reading books together, picnics, walks, biking, cooking, games and trips to parks, the zoo, museums, and the library are some activities. Parents may have skills to pass along to their children, such as working on the car, computer, or sewing machine. These activities assist children to grow in skills and independence and share in an activity that the parent enjoys.

A parent’s role does not necessarily begin and end with scheduled parenting time. The parent should participate in parent/teacher conferences, attend school functions, help children with homework, and assist in taking the children to medical appointments and their social or sports activities.

Participating and sharing in activities allows parents to remain involved with their children. However, both parents need to establish “normal” routines with chores, bedtimes, rules and standards for behavior, and regular meals to help children feel secure and stable.

**SOLVING PROBLEMS** – Parents need to communicate about parenting. When problems arise, the first impulse may be to blame the other parent. Anger and blaming are barriers that interfere with communication. Communication requires special skills and compromise. When there is a problem, parents need a plan.

First, ask yourself:

- Is this a child-related problem? Bringing up problems that have to do with the parents’ relationship is not part of the business of parenting.
- Does this problem have to do with the children’s health, education or parenting time? Divorced parents may have to limit discussions to these three topics.
- Is a change in the parenting time schedule convenient for me only or does it accommodate the other parent or the children?
- Can the problem wait or does it need to be addressed as soon as possible?
- Make a list of the issues to be discussed and your proposals. Let it sit for a few days to see if you have any changes or need more information before arranging a meeting.

When parents meet for problem solving:

- Arrange a time and place that is convenient for both parents.
- Limit discussions to 30 minutes. When discussions go longer, emotions may get out of hand.
- Only cover a few issues in one session. Start with the easy problems and move on to the more difficult.
- Be specific about what you mean. Set ground rules that there will be no personal attacks or name calling.
- If you disagree, look for ways that each parent can give a little.
- Write down any agreements you make and make sure that each of you has a copy. Once a decision is made, put it away and don’t try to re-think it.

# BREAKUP GAMES – NO ONE WINS

Ending a relationship is painful, and people who are hurting often act in ways that hurt other people. They may play “breakup games” in which they attempt to use or manipulate someone in order to gain control over their lives, but the games aren’t fun and they’re not good for anyone involved. The games are usually not intentional – they often just happen unless one recognizes and avoids them.

In the beginning of the divorce or separation, people may actually “win” at one or two of the games. They then feel that they got something out of the mess and have some kind of control over the situation. However, breakup games result in the player feeling guilty, untrustworthy and depressed, and most importantly, children are hurt. No one wins in breakup games.

## GAMES PARENTS PLAY

- **I Spy**
  - A parent sometimes asks a child a lot of questions about what is going on in the other parent’s home – questions about whether mom or dad has a boyfriend or girlfriend, if the new boyfriend/girlfriend is spending the night, if mom or dad is drinking or using drugs, if mom or dad has asked questions about him or her. Sometimes the questions are to satisfy curiosity, but sometimes they are to hurt the other parent or to hurt the parent asking the questions. Sometimes the questions are to help a parent feel better about himself or herself – that the other parent is not doing well without the relationship.
  - Enlisting children to play this game complicates and confuses the relationships they have with both parents and is damaging to their emotional well-being.
  
- **Tug of War**
  - Parents sometimes continue their conflicts after the separation. Each side looks for support to his/her side because then parents can assure themselves that they are “right” because the child is on their side.
  - Children are caught in the middle and feel as though they are being ripped apart. Children usually lose respect for both parents and themselves because children are a part of both parents.

- **Messenger**
  - Warring parents can't stand to talk to each other and sometimes don't want to take chance of making the other parent angry. So they ask children to take little messages to the other parent – “you are two weeks behind in child support and when are you going to pay,” “the house is still half mine and you had better make sure the furnace is repaired,” “if I don't get Christmas this year, I won't pay child support.”
  - Children should not be involved in parents' fights. Children need to love both parents because it makes them feel better about themselves.
  
- **I've Got You Babe**
  - When parents divorce, they become overwhelmed and feel less than whole. They feel alone and miss the companionship and help with responsibilities that were part of the relationship. They may count on the children to fill the gap and look to them for emotional support or to be the little mother or man of the house.
  - Children feel used when thrust into the role of being the parents' friend or helpmate. They often must grow up before they are ready and miss out on being children.
  
- **The Money Game**
  - Parents often have a financial crunch when they become single parents. They sometimes let children know how worried they are when bills come due or are overdue. They may blame the other parent for their money problems.
  - This behavior scares children and makes them feel insecure. They may become preoccupied with thoughts about how they can bring money into the home or they may think that if they aren't there, the parent will be able to cope.
  
- **I'm Starting Over**
  - Sometimes divorce makes parents feel that they are starting over and that they are young again. They may adopt clothing or hair styles of someone much younger than them. They may stay out late or not come home until morning.
  - Children find it embarrassing and confusing when parents act like “one of the kids.”
  
- **I Owe My Kid**
  - Parents know that separation hurts children, and they feel guilty. Some try to make it up to the children by letting them off the hook with chores and responsibilities or by buying the children presents, sometimes going without things themselves to do it.
  - Children know when parents are trying to buy their love. It makes them feel uncomfortable. Children need the consistency of still having to do their regularly assigned chores, and they need love and attention.

- **Over My Dead Body**
  - Sometimes parents play custody and visitation games. They try to get even with the other parent for some hurt that occurred in the relationship or caused the breakup. They try to keep the children from the other parent or they try to gain custody to break the other parent financially through court battles, to show that they are the better parent, or to intimidate the other parent to gain something else.
  - Children feel at fault in these games; if they weren't around, they wouldn't be a vehicle for the parents to continue to fight. They believe that their feelings don't matter because the parents are so consumed with fighting the war.
  
- **Name Calling**
  - A parent sometimes calls the other parent names or says nasty things about the other parent when the children can hear it. The parent is hurt or angry and may even believe that the children should know the "truth" about the other parent.
  - Children don't feel good about themselves when a part of themselves comes from the "no good" parent. Children need to learn for themselves the strengths and shortfalls of each parent. They want and need a good relationship with both parents.
  
- **Guided Missile**
  - A parent may try to use the children as a weapon to change the other parent's behavior or to try to get something from the other parent. The parent may refuse to pay child support because he/she believes the other parent is using it for entertainment or new clothes. The parent may refuse visitation because a new girlfriend or boyfriend is in the life of the other parent and that parent is now immoral or not giving enough time to the children.
  - This behavior is unfair to children. Children should not be used as a pawn for a parent to retaliate against the other parent.

# GAMES CHILDREN PLAY

- **I'll Be On Your Side If You Give Me What I Want**
  - Children sometimes tell a parent what the other parent has given them or the places the other parent has taken them to try to gain similar advantages from that parent. Children sometimes tell a parent the grievances they have about the other parent to make that parent play into their hands.
  - Parents need to realize that children are not always accurate reporters and that they do try to manipulate situations to their advantage.
- **But Mom (Or Dad) Said Yes**
  - This game is also played by children to get their own way at the expense of one of the parents. Children know the kinds of events or activities that one parent may allow but not the other. This game works particularly well if the parent who allows the activity is outside the home. The children enlist that parent's support and if the other parent says no, children drop the bombshell – "but dad/mom said it would be OK." This also works when parents have different rules or responsibilities for the children.
  - If possible, divorced or separated parents should continue to present a united front to children and try to determine the position the other parent may take. Children need to know that while each parent may have different rules, the rules of the household in which they are residing when an issue arises should be followed.
- **Blackmail**
  - Children may try to manipulate a parent when they are feeling frustrated by change or want their own way. Children may tell a parent they won't visit or they will go and live with the other parent if the parent has a new girlfriend/boyfriend, is going to remarry, tells the children they can't do something, or disciplines the children.
  - If this game is not brought to a halt, children gain power over the parent. Children need to understand that there are rules and consequences for broken rules, and parents have to get on with their lives too.
- **I'll Get Even With You**
  - Children rarely understand the motivation and consequences for this game as they do for the other breakup games they play. Children sometimes display hurt and anger by acting differently from ways they behaved before. Some children may be withdrawn or act violently toward themselves or others. Sometimes the child at home may be different from the child at school.
  - Parents who are understanding and have good communication with children may be able to address the problems and help children resolve the feelings of hurt and anger. Some children may need professional help and should be involved in counseling.

# CONCLUSION

When children are asked what they want to see happen after their parents divorce or separate, they tend to answer that they would like their parents back together again. When parents are asked the same question, most respond that they want nothing to do with their former partner.

The adjustments required in post-divorce/separation relationships are never easy, as the end of a relationship is one of life's most stressful events for everyone involved. Children are devastated by divorce and feel powerless. Typically, they experience tremendous loss and pain. They have been dependent on both parents, and the foundation has been knocked out from under them. They feel disbelief that the family will no longer exist as they have known it. Many are anxious, angry, sad, depressed and confused about what is happening. They feel abandoned, and they suffer a drop in self-esteem.

Just when children need them most, many newly-divorced parents need some time for themselves to regain a sense of balance and personal well-being. If grieving parents lose their ability to consider their children's needs, everyone suffers. It is hard enough to raise children when parents are together and getting along well; it is much more difficult when divorced parents are having problems communicating with each other.

Children need relationships with both parents after divorce, and parents must do what they can to promote those relationships. Children desperately need parental cooperation. Parents can learn to get along after divorce and share responsibilities for their children even if they did not get along as partners. Parents or children who have great difficulty coping with divorce should seek professional help. Hopefully, the information in this booklet will serve as a guide to raising secure and healthy children after your relationship with the other parent has ended.

# CHILDREN'S BILL OF RIGHTS

1. The right to be treated as important human beings, with unique feelings, ideas and desires, and not as a source of argument between parents.
2. The right to a continuing relationship with both parents and the freedom to receive love from and express love for both.
3. The right to express love and affection for each parent without having to stifle that love because of fear of disapproval by the other parent.
4. The right to know that their parents' decision to divorce or end their relationship is not their responsibility and that they may live with one parent and visit the other.
5. The right to continuing care and guidance from both parents.
6. The right to honest answers to questions about the changing family relationships.
7. The right to know and appreciate what is good in each parent without one parent degrading the other.
8. The right to have a relaxed, secure relationship with both parents without being placed in a position to manipulate one parent against the other.
9. The right to have the custodial parent not undermine visitation by suggesting tempting alternatives or by threatening to withhold visitation as a punishment for the children's wrongdoing.
10. The right to be able to experience regular and consistent visitation and the right to know the reason for cancelled visits.

# BOOKS ON DIVORCE & CO-PARENTING

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS ON DIVORCE (arranged by youngest to oldest in age range):

*Two Homes*, by Claire Masurel & Kady MacDonald Denton, Candlewick Press ©2004  
Young Alex introduces himself and parents, then announces that he has two homes, and explains in detail his two homes. For children ages 2-5.

*Ginger Brown: Too Many Houses*, by Sharon Dennis Wyeth, First Stepping Stone Books, Random House ©1996  
When her parents separate, Ginger Brown, a bi-racial child, spends a lot of time moving from house to house. Addresses the important role that grandparents play in supporting their grandchildren and the first difficult year as Ginger's family structure changes. For children ages 3-7.

*Let's Talk About Divorce*, by Fred Rogers, Putnam ©1996  
Book with pictures and easy to understand explanations about divorce. For children ages 3-7.

*I Live With Daddy*, by Judith Vigna, Albert Whitman & Company ©1997  
Olivia lives with her father and experiences her mother missing many of her scheduled visiting times while her father responds appropriately to Olivia's feelings and concerns. For children ages 4-8.

*Was It the Chocolate Pudding? A Story for Little Kids About Divorce*, Sandra Levins & Bryan Langdo, American Psychological Association ©2006  
Provides age appropriate explanations of what changes divorce may bring for children. Reassures children that the divorce is not their fault. For children ages 4-8.

*What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids*, by Kent Winchester & Roberta Bayer, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. ©2001  
This book provides a child-friendly explanation of what divorce is, that it is not the child's fault, and families survive divorce. For children ages 7-12.

*Divorced but Still My Parents*, by Shirley Thomas & Dorothy Rankin, Springboard Publications ©1998  
Organized according to the five stages of grief. Offers insight on common problems and worries children face along with ideas for coping and feeling better. Includes activities and drawings. Parents can help by reading the book along with their children. For children ages 8-12.

*Divorce (Preteen Pressures)*, by Debra Goldentyer, Raintree Steck-Vaughn ©1998  
Parents and children offer their perspectives on separation, divorce and remarriage, including typical feelings preteens may have when faced with various issues and experiences such as custody, the court system, mediation and dating. For children ages 8-12.

*How To Survive Your Parents' Divorce: Kids' Advice to Kids*, by Gayle Kimball, Equality Press ©1994

Includes advice from over 250 young people on how they coped with their parents' divorce. Covers topics on communication, getting help, family activities, school success and remarriage. Encourages young people to keep a journal and offers journaling questions at the end of each chapter. For children ages 13-17.

## **CO-PARENTING:**

*Co-Parenting 101: Helping Your Kids Thrive in Two Households After Divorce*, by Deesha Philyaw & Michael D. Thomas, New Harbinger Publications, Inc. ©2013

This book is written by a formerly married couple who set aside their differences to successfully co-parent their two children.

*Families Apart: Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting*, by Melinda Blau, Putnam Publishing Group ©1994

Offers insight on healing one's self, listening to children, respecting the other parent, sharing parenting time, accepting differences, communicating with children, stepping outside of traditional gender roles, embracing change, and accepting that co-parenting is forever.

*Parents are Forever: A Step-By-Step Guide to Becoming Successful Co-Parents After Divorce*, by Shirley Thomas, Springboard Publications ©1995

Offers a step-by-step plan for how key adults in a child's life can work together better. Guides parents through their own grief and healing process after divorce.

## **GENERAL DIVORCE ISSUES:**

*Good Parenting Through Your Divorce*, by Mary Ellen Hannibal, Marlowe & Company ©2002

Covers step-by-step key topics concerning all parents and children throughout the divorce and beyond, including how to recognize, cultivate, and respond to your child's feelings; how divorce affects your child's development and how to support your child's health growth over time; how to connect with your children through better communication and how to manage communication with your co-parent; how to support your child's expressive self; the challenge of behavior and discipline; the dos and don'ts of shared parenting.

*Growing Up With Divorce: Helping Your Child Avoid Immediate and Later Emotional Problems*, by Neil Kalter, Free Press ©1990

Useful book for parents in helping children more openly discuss their feelings about divorce, helping children when parents start dating and how to minimize the stress of divided loyalties.

*Mom's House, Dad's House: Making two homes for your child*, by Isolina Ricci, Ph.D., Simon & Schuster ©1997

Provides insight into how a child of divorce, separation or remarriage can thrive in multiple households, with their parents' concerted efforts.

*How To Help Your Child Overcome Your Divorce: A Support Guide For Families (1<sup>st</sup> ed.)*, by Elissa P. Benedek & Catherine F. Brown, Newmarket Press ©2001  
Written by a leading child psychiatrist and forensic expert for separated, divorcing, and divorced parents with children ages 12 and under. Offers parents information and advice on support groups, how to help children adjust to separation and divorce, how to tell children the news and reassure them of their parents' love and care for them, ways to keep the relationship between ex-spouses as free of conflict as possible, and how to help children feel good about themselves and grow as individuals.

*What About The Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During and After Divorce*, by Judith S. Wallerstein & Sandra Blakeslee, Hyperion ©2003  
Parenting guidebook that addresses what you should say and do for children at each age and stage of development, how divorce changes your life in many ways in the years ahead, the challenges of how to be an effective parent outside of marriage, how to choose the custody plan that is best for your child, what you need to know to create a healthy remarriage, and what to say to your children when they reach adulthood.

### **GRIEF, LOSS AND OTHER FEELINGS:**

*Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss*, by Claudia J. Jarratt, Harvard Common Press ©1994  
Step-by-step guidance for any adult who wants to help a child talk about, cope with and recover from a loss, such as death, divorce, a loved one's illness, or a family move. Offers advice, specific techniques, and other ideas for helping children overcome sadness, anger, and anxiety they feel during a difficult time.

*Letting Go of Anger: The Eleven Most Common Anger Styles and What to do About Them*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), by Ron Potter-Efron & Pat Potter-Efron, New Harbinger Publications, Inc. ©2006  
This book contains revealing self-tests and real-life examples designed to help readers better understand their anger styles and offers simple methods for recognizing and changing the ways anger is expressed.

### **HEADING A STEP-FAMILY:**

*The Family Puzzle*, by Nancy S. Palmer, William D. Palmer & Kay Marshall, Strom Pinon Press ©1996  
Addresses the issues of blended families to assist parents in avoiding the common pitfalls of the blending process and helping parents recognize the benefits of their new situation. Covers the ins and outs of step parenting, how to deal with ex-spouses, relatives and friends, and ways to make the transition as smooth as possible for the children involved.

## **HIGH CONFLICT DIVORCE:**

*The Co-Parenting Survival Guide: Letting Go of the Conflict After the Divorce*, by E. Thayer & J. Zimmerman, New Harbinger Publications ©2001

Focuses on steps to set aside conflict and start over with clear guidance on developing low-conflict communication, creating a “business relationship” with a partner who has betrayed you repeatedly, and making transitions better for children.

*Custody Chaos, Personal Peace: Sharing Custody with an Ex Who Drives You Crazy*, by Jeffrey P. Whittmann, Perigree ©2001

Wisdom, encouragement and skill-specific advice for anyone dealing with a difficult former partner.

## **KID’S QUESTIONS:**

*Difficult Questions Kids Ask and Are Too Afraid to Ask About Divorce*, by Meg Schneider & Joan Zuckerberg, Fireside ©1996

Explores the confusion and hidden fears that children often experience during divorce. Offers advice on how parents can truthfully answer children’s questions without frightening them, how to strengthen the parent-child relationship, and how to build trusting relationships.

*Speaking of Divorce: How to Talk with Your Kids and Help them Cope*, by Roberta Bayer & Kent Winchester, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc. ©2001

Provides guidance about how your divorce impacts your children, in particular those 12 and younger, and what you can do to help create a stable environment for them.

## **PARENTING FROM A DISTANCE:**

*101 Ways to be a Long Distance Super Dad – or Mom Too!*, by George Newman, Blossom Valley Press ©2008

A guide for parents who live long distance from their children.

*Questions from Dad*, by Dwight Twilley, Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc. ©1994

An alternative to feeling helpless as an absent parent. A fun how-to book on staying in touch with your children.

## **WORKBOOK:**

*The Children’s Book.....For the Sake of the Children*, by Marilyn McKnight, Marilyn S. Erickson & Stephen K. Erickson, CPI Publications ©1992

A communication workbook for separate parenting after divorce. Intended to replace the common notebook transferred between parents, it contains and organizes information pertinent to the children in one workbook which is exchanged between the parents during transfers. In addition to forms for personal, medical and educational information, it contains many blank pages, useful for encouraging written communication between the parents and discouraging using the child to carry messages between the parents.

# RESOURCES TO FIND HELP

## RESOURCE

## TELEPHONE

\*All 734 area code  
unless otherwise noted

### **Alcohol and Drug Abuse**

Alcoholics Anonymous Helpline .....	482-5700
<a href="http://www.aa.org">www.aa.org</a>	
Alateen/Alanon Information Line .....	995-4949
<a href="http://www.al-anon.org">www.al-anon.org</a>	
Dawn Farm.....	485-8725
<a href="http://www.dawnfarm.org">www.dawnfarm.org</a>	
Home of New Vision (Services for Women) .....	975-1602
<a href="http://www.homeofnewvision.org">www.homeofnewvision.org</a>	

### **Counseling**

Ann Arbor Center for the Family.....	995-5181
<a href="http://www.annarborcenter.com">www.annarborcenter.com</a>	
Catholic Social Services.....	971-9781
Thrive Program.....	926-1058
<a href="http://www.csswashtenaw.org">www.csswashtenaw.org</a>	
Chelsea Community Behavioral Health Services.....	593-5251
<a href="http://www.stjoeschelsea.org/behavioralhealthservices">www.stjoeschelsea.org/behavioralhealthservices</a>	
Eastern Michigan University Psychology Clinic.....	487-4987
HelpSource.....	973-1900
Huron Valley Child Guidance Clinic.....	971-9605
Ozone House.....	662-2222
<a href="http://www.ozonehouse.org">www.ozonehouse.org</a>	
SOS Community Crisis Center (24 hours).....	485-3222
University of Michigan Center for the Child and Family.....	764-9466
<a href="http://www.uccf.umich.edu">www.uccf.umich.edu</a>	
Women's Center of SE Michigan.....	973-6779
<a href="http://www.womenscentersemi.org">www.womenscentersemi.org</a>	

### **Crisis Assistance**

SAFE House (services for survivors of DV & sexual assault).....	995-5444
<a href="http://www.safehousecenter.org">www.safehousecenter.org</a>	
SOS Community Crisis Center.....	485-3222

### **Dental Care**

Community Dental Center.....	998-9640
<a href="http://www.dent.umich.edu">www.dent.umich.edu</a>	
Hope Dental Clinic.....	480-9575
<a href="http://www.thehopeclinic.org">www.thehopeclinic.org</a>	

# RESOURCES TO FIND HELP

## RESOURCE

## TELEPHONE

\*All 734 area code  
unless otherwise noted

### **Dental Care continued**

University of Michigan Dental School Children’s Clinic.....	764-1523
<a href="http://www.dent.umich.edu">www.dent.umich.edu</a>	
Washtenaw Children’s Dental Clinic.....	663-7073
<a href="http://www.ewashtenaw.org">www.ewashtenaw.org</a>	
Washtenaw County Dental Clinic.....	877-313-6232
Washtenaw District Dental Society (assistance in finding a dentist).....	761-2445
<a href="http://www.washtenawdentalsociety.org">www.washtenawdentalsociety.org</a>	

### **Family Planning**

Corner Health Center.....	484-3600
Planned Parenthood.....	973-0155 or 485-0144
<a href="http://www.plannedparenthood.org">www.plannedparenthood.org</a>	

### **Family Violence**

Child Protective Services.....	855-444-3911
SAFE House.....	995-5444
<a href="http://www.safehousecenter.org">www.safehousecenter.org</a>	
Washtenaw County Sheriff’s Dept...Non-emergency...994-2911..Emergency.....	911

### **General**

Child Care Network.....	975-1840
<a href="http://www.childcarenetwork.org">www.childcarenetwork.org</a>	
Family Independence Agency/Department of Human Services.....	481-2000
<a href="http://www.ewashtenaw.org">www.ewashtenaw.org</a>	
Michigan Works Service Center.....	714-9814
<a href="http://www.michiganworks.org">www.michiganworks.org</a>	
Salvation Army – Ann Arbor.....	668-8353
Ypsilanti.....	482-4700
<a href="http://www.sawashtenaw.org">www.sawashtenaw.org</a>	
Student Advocacy Center.....	482-0489
<a href="http://www.studentadvocacycenter.org">www.studentadvocacycenter.org</a>	

### **Health Care**

ACCESS (Referral for Medicaid recipients).....	544-3050
Corner Health Center.....	484-3600
HOPE Medical Clinic.....	481-0111
<a href="http://www.thehopeclinic.org">www.thehopeclinic.org</a>	
Michigan Children’s Special Health Care Services.....	800-359-3722
<a href="https://thcmi.com/cshcs/">https://thcmi.com/cshcs/</a>	

# RESOURCES TO FIND HELP

## RESOURCE

## TELEPHONE

\*All 734 area code  
unless otherwise noted

### Health Care continued

Packard Health.....	971-1073
<a href="http://www.packardhealth.org">www.packardhealth.org</a>	
Poison Center.....	800-222-1222
<a href="http://www.poison.org">www.poison.org</a>	
Washtenaw County Medical Society (assistance finding a doctor) .....	668-6241
<a href="https://washtenawcms.wordpress.com/">https://washtenawcms.wordpress.com/</a>	
Washtenaw County Public Health.....	544-6700
<a href="http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org">http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org</a>	

### Legal

Family Law Project.....	998-9454
<a href="http://www.lsscm.org">www.lsscm.org</a>	
Legal Services of South Central Michigan.....	665-6181
<a href="http://www.lsscm.org">www.lsscm.org</a>	
Michigan Legal Help	
<a href="http://www.MichiganLegalHelp.org">www.MichiganLegalHelp.org</a>	
Washtenaw County Prosecuting Attorney.....	222-6620
<a href="http://www.ewashtenaw.org">www.ewashtenaw.org</a>	
Washtenaw County Bar Referral Services.....	996-3229
<a href="http://www.washbar.org">www.washbar.org</a>	

### Parent Support

Michigan State University Extension (Nurturing Parenting classes).....	222-3943
<a href="http://www.msue.anr.msu.edu/events/nurturing_parenting_7">www.msue.anr.msu.edu/events/nurturing_parenting_7</a>	
National Parent Help Line.....	855-427-2736
<a href="http://www.nationalparenthelpline.org">www.nationalparenthelpline.org</a>	
Parents Without Partners (social support group).....	433-1668
<a href="http://www.parentswithoutpartners.org">www.parentswithoutpartners.org</a>	

### Services for the Disabled

Michigan Rehabilitation Services (Livingston & Washtenaw Co.).....	677-1125
Washtenaw Association for Community Advocacy.....	662-1256
<a href="http://www.washtenawaca.org">www.washtenawaca.org</a>	
Washtenaw Intermediate School District – Special Education.....	994-8100
<a href="http://www.washtenawisd.org">www.washtenawisd.org</a>	

*\*For a proposed parenting time plan questionnaire that can help you and your former partner develop a parenting time schedule that works for you and the children, please visit:*  
[http://washtenawtrialcourt.org/forms/foc\\_forms/Proposed\\_Parenting\\_Time\\_Plan\\_pdf](http://washtenawtrialcourt.org/forms/foc_forms/Proposed_Parenting_Time_Plan_pdf)