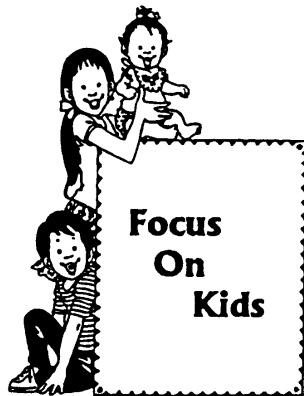


UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
M Extension



FOCUS ON KIDS

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MOVING?

Please update your mailing information so you can continue to receive this important newsletter. Contact the Specialist listed above in the County where you attended FOK.

Divorce Through Your Child's Eyes

Lisa Wallace
Human Development Specialist

“Where’s my dog going to live?”
“Where will I live?”
“Will I get to see Mom/Dad?”

If you have children old enough to understand divorce, chances are they have asked or thought about these questions. Your separation and ultimate living apart has been an adjustment for you. But, often, as adults, we believe children are “too young” to know what is going on. We often say they are flexible and that they have no worries.

But, divorce requires adjustment for everyone, and the adjustment may be particularly difficult for your children. Not all children are alike. Their needs vary based on their age, developmental level and their temperament and personality. There are ways you can help your children adjust smoothly.

At the top of the list should be to resolve your own emotional issues as quickly as possible so you can be emotionally available to your children. If your children experience a high level of hostility between you and their other parent, they will almost always have a harder time adjusting. For this reason, you need to work at reducing that conflict for the sake of your children.

Good communication with your children is important. Explain as

much as possible about the situation and give them information about what the future will be like such as:

- ◆ Where they will live
- ◆ Where they will go to school
- ◆ When they may see the other parent
- ◆ Where will they spend the holidays

Allow children to express their feelings. Reading to children helps them identify and work through their feelings. Children also need to be reassured that the **divorce was not their fault**.

Support your child's love for and relationship with the other parent. Children need ongoing parenting. Limits provide security and boundaries for your children and they need to be consistently enforced by both parents.

A stable environment is one factor that has a strong influence on how children adjust to divorce. If possible, keep their daily routines as free of change as possible. This includes school, childcare, living situations, finances, friends and family.

Seek counseling if needed. This is especially important when children have difficulty adjusting or exhibit stress-related behavior longer than two or three months. It is a sign of strong families to be able to identify a problem and to seek help in solving it.

There is No Place Like Home: creating two comfortable homes

There's no place like home, but, when you're a child and your parents live apart, you have two houses to call "home." And, your child should feel comfortable both in your home and in the home of the other parent.

Make sure that each home contains familiar items that will help your child feel secure

in both places. Think about their needs and comforts.

If possible, work with your child's other parent and include the following items in *both* households:

- ◆ Favorite toys and games
- ◆ Favorite foods
- ◆ Photos of all family members

- ◆ Basic school supplies (paper, pencils, ruler, scissors, etc.)
- ◆ Clothing such as underwear, socks, pajamas, jeans, etc.



Consider what makes your child comfortable at both homes and plan accordingly.

Five Common Feelings For Kids of Divorce



Divorce affects children differently, depending on their gender and age and stage of development. Their world, their security, and their stability seems to fall apart when their parents divorce.

The following are universal responses that researchers have

found among children of divorce:

- ◆ They worry that their parents don't love them any more and they feel abandoned. They feel like the parent who left has divorced them too.
- ◆ They feel powerless and helpless because they can't get their parents back together. They can't speed up or slow down the process.
- ◆ They often feel they are at fault. They may believe some thing they did or said caused a parent to leave.
- ◆ They grieve. Divorce is a loss in the lives of children and parents. They experience a grieving process very similar to mourning a death.
- ◆ They experience conflicts of loyalty. They feel they have to choose sides.



Questions and Answers

Q. What are some activities I can do with my kids to help them cope with divorce?

A. If your children are preschool or older, there are several activities such as drawing, story writing and telling, reading books and role playing with puppets that can open the communications about divorce and their lives. For specifics on these ideas, get on the web and go to <http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/hesguide/humanrel/gh6602.htm> Look for a publication entitled, *Activities for Helping Children Deal with Divorce*. Or, if you don't have Internet access, call your Extension Center to request a copy.

Web Resources

Helping Infants and Toddlers Adjust to Divorce...<http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/hesguide/humanrel>
Divorce Matters: A Child's View.....<http://www.nncc.org/Parent/childview.html>