

◇ Chapter 14
Divorce and Remarriage

Enrichment Activities

TEENS' VIEWPOINTS ON DIVORCE

It is difficult to describe the effects of divorce. Teens who have survived a divorce have many ideas and suggestions for making the experience as easy as possible on the children involved.

Directions: Form a group with two or three classmates. Brainstorm a list of dos and don'ts for parents wanting to make their divorce as manageable as possible for children of different ages. Then organize your list by categories — for example, how to break the news, or expectations of teens. Fill in each category and its corresponding list of dos and don'ts below. If you need more categories, use another sheet of paper. Then use your lists to create a poster or pamphlet that will communicate your message to parents contemplating divorce.

Category 1:	Category 2:
Category 3:	Category 4:

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DEALING WITH DIVORCE

Divorce is a traumatic event for everyone involved. Many teens of divorced parents say the worst day of their lives was the day their parents told them they were getting a divorce. For teens, a divorce comes at a time when they are already undergoing a great deal of physical and emotional change. As in other traumatic events, such as the death of a loved one, teens often experience the stages of grief when parents go through a divorce.

1. What are some of the things teens may grieve during a divorce?

Reactions to Divorce

As with many painful situations, teens often react with shock and disbelief when told that their parents are getting a divorce. Anger at one or both parents is common. Some teens feel they are somehow responsible for their parents' breakup. Others are embarrassed, because they feel it makes them different from their peers. They may try to hide the problem or keep it a secret. Since teens may be involved in love relationships of their own, their understanding of love may be affected. These emotional conflicts may affect a teen's self-worth, leading them to feel rejected and unloved.

Divorce can also expose teens to new pressures and difficulties not experienced by their peers. The family home may be sold, causing a sense of loss and rootlessness. Relations with extended family members can suffer as ties are cut or as families try to lay blame on one parent or the other. Holidays and traditions may be changed drastically or dropped completely. Teens may have to deal with parents who do things that the parents themselves have preached against. Even seemingly trivial decisions, such as which parent to invite to a school function, can be painful.

Added Responsibilities

Some teens have to assume new responsibilities after the parents divorce. If finances are strained, teens may be forced to get a job to help with household expenses. Often the family roles are reversed. Teens may become the caregivers and comforters, not only of younger siblings but also of one or both parents. Many begin to feel that it is up to them to hold the family together.

Consequences of Divorce

The physical and emotional upheaval of divorce can have serious consequences on teens. Their grades may drop, especially if they must care for younger siblings. Teen females of divorced parents are more likely to use drugs than their peers. They also tend to become sexually active at a younger age. Divorce can make some teens question the idea of marriage. Some vow never to get married at all

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Looking for Help

Teens who are living through a family divorce may need to find support resources. Feelings need to be expressed. Talking or writing to someone close and trusted can help. Turning to a good friend, a family member, or a school counselor for a heart-to-heart talk is a good idea. Someone who has been through the divorce experience might be a particularly good resource. Communities often have useful programs and support groups for children of divorce. A hotline is another alternative. Through one of these sources or the library, pamphlets and books on coping with divorce can be located as well.

Teens need to realize that a sense of loss occurs during a divorce. Part of healing means going through the grief process, as described in Chapter 15 of the *Families Today* text. During such times it helps to keep in touch with special interests. Activities and friends allow a teen to get away from pressures at home. They can help a teen move back from the hurtful feelings of aloneness, depression, confusion, and anger that are often present. When divorce occurs, teens can be friends to parents, but they cannot solve their problems. Parental problems belong to the parents, not the teens. Teens should not have to take sides. Troubled parents make mistakes and may not think clearly during a divorce. With understanding and communication, teens and their parents can manage the difficult times.

The Positive Side

Divorce can have some beneficial outcomes. Eighteen-year-old Elena has this to say about her parents' divorce:

"I was very sad and scared when my parents told me they were thinking about getting a divorce. I was fifteen. It was a very hard time for everyone. But, my parents made things as easy for me as they could. They made sure I knew that I did nothing to cause their divorce. They made sure I knew that I came first with both of them. I'm proud of them for doing what they felt was right for them. Because of my parents' divorce, I developed a strong, separate relationship with each of my parents. They are still good friends, which means we celebrate special events together. It's nice to see both of them happy now."

2. What do you think about Elena's description of her parents' divorce? What did her parents do to help her?

3. Do you think Elena should be proud of her parents for doing what they felt was right for them? Why or why not?

Getting through a divorce is usually difficult, but it can be done. Teens and adults need to take one day at a time. They face the reality of the situation, and they learn to make the best of today and plan for tomorrow. It may take some time, but eventually life does get better.

Focus In

How can you help a friend whose parents are going through a divorce? Put your ideas in the form of a poster that contains words and illustrations.