



Divorce and Its Effects on Children: Stop the Chaos, Work Together, and Ensure a Healthy Outcome for YOUR kids, by Jarrod Hood, MA, LPC

What is Divorce?

Divorce is a difficult and emotional process that can be especially hard on children. It is important for parents to understand the effects of divorce on their children and how to help them cope with the situation. This lesson will provide an overview of divorce and how to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce.

Divorce is the legal process of ending a marriage. It is a difficult process for all involved, especially children. Children of divorce can experience a wide range of emotions, including sadness, fear, confusion, and anger. It is important for parents to recognize these feelings and provide support and

understanding to their children. Parents should also strive to keep the children out of the conflict and chaos of the divorce process.

Divorce is a difficult process for everyone involved, especially children. It is important for parents to understand the effects of divorce on their children and to provide support and understanding. Parents should also strive to keep their children out of the chaos of the divorce process. With the right support and guidance, children can cope with the situation and build effective ways to manage their feelings.

Common Challenges Faced by Children of Divorce

Divorce is an incredibly difficult experience for everyone involved, but it can be especially difficult for children. During a divorce, children can feel overwhelmed and confused by the chaos and changes that come with it. Children of divorce may experience a range of emotions, including sadness, anger, guilt, fear, and confusion. They may also struggle with feelings of abandonment, low self-esteem, and difficulty trusting others. Additionally, children of divorce may have difficulty forming relationships with peers, as well as with their parents. It is important to be aware of these

challenges and to provide support to children of divorce.

Here is the truth: all families come in different shapes and sizes. In working with families over a decade, and specializing in this area, I have found that similar themes are prevalent in working with families. But every system is unique in its own way, with its own complex challenges.

Grief is a part of this process. There is no getting around it. Grief is the idea that something that was there is no longer there. The family system that was once intact is now broken. This comes with sadness, pain, and loss. Parents need to understand that they cannot "fix" this feeling. It is going to be a process that has to heal over time.

At times, when there has been high conflict, the child can experience a sense of relief around the prospect that the parents will not be living together anymore. But this does not mean the child is not grieving. Living in a constant state of tension and fear leads to a higher probability of anxiety and depression down the road.

Do not be surprised if your child or teen struggles initially or periodically with trusting others. What they have known has been shaken, and this can lead to

self doubt and distrust. This is especially true when children are directly in the middle of the conflict between the two homes. If the two primary attachment figures in their lives are giving two very different messages around reality, several options may happen. They align with one parent over the other. They start seeing the other parent as untrustworthy. And in some cases, this is true. Kids do get lied to in the litigation process. Another option is that they decide they are not going to believe either message, and just focus on figuring things out on their own. The challenge with this is this could lead to increased loneliness and a sense of distrust with others, including friends.

In this course, I am going to coach you on working towards the best interests of your child. Do not let the grief of your current situation lead you to compounding grief for your child.

Effects of Divorce on Children

It can be difficult to explain to children why their parents are separating and how it will impact their lives. This lesson will provide guidance on how to keep children out of the chaos of divorce and help them cope with the changes.

When parents are divorcing, it is important to keep children out of the conflict. This can be done by avoiding arguments in front of the children, avoiding badmouthing the other parent, and maintaining a predictability and consistency around the new normal. If possible, keeping the same school, activities, and routines is important. Divorce is expensive. Families can spend a lot of money on attorneys, experts, counselors, and it can feel like a money pit. Collaboration and working together is crucial. So often- this is part of the reason for the divorce in the first place, so families sometimes have a hard time developing rhythm in the new normal. But most parents agree: they want their kids to be ok. And parents have to come together and work as a co-parenting team for this to happen. Additionally, it is important to provide emotional support to the children and allow them to express their feelings. Lastly, it is important to create a positive environment for the children and provide them with a sense of security.

Divorce can be a difficult and emotional process for children, but by following the tips outlined in this lesson, parents can help keep their children out of the chaos of divorce and help them cope with the changes. It is important to remember that children need love and support during this difficult time.

Strategies to Help Children Adjust to Divorce

Provide Consistent Structure and Discipline

Divorce is a difficult and chaotic time for children. Many times, it can be hard for them to understand why their parents are no longer together, and it can be even harder for them to adjust to the changes that come with it. Sometimes, kids totally get why their parents are divorcing. They are ready for the fighting to decrease. To help children cope with the chaos of a family system breaking apart, it is important to provide them with consistent structure and discipline. This lesson will discuss how to do this.

Providing consistent structure and discipline for children during a divorce is essential. This means setting clear expectations and boundaries, and enforcing them consistently. It is important to have a routine that is followed each day, and to provide children with a safe and secure environment. The goal is for this routine to be supported in each home.

Bedtime- this can be a challenging one. What does your kids need with their sleep? Is one parent loosey goosey, and the other parent on the other side. When in doubt- look at what the research says and

make a working agreement to follow this closely. A three year old needs more sleep than a 13 year old.

Pitfalls to avoid: Don't set up your coparent to be the bad guy. Work to find a consistent time. Weekends can especially be difficult, especially as kids get older. I ask parents to consider these questions in making decisions around sleep. Some questions to consider? What are the sleep needs of your child? we all know people who can do 5 hours and not need the long sleep. We also know people where if they don't get 8 hours, you better watch out. How does your child function if he does not get good sleep? Some kids do pretty well, other kids complete meltdown.

Diet- Does your child have a specialized diet that has been recommended by his doctor, nutritionist, etc?

This can also be a challenging co-parenting issue, as it falls into the realm of money as well. Specialized diets can be expensive, and sometimes co-parents are not on the same page financially or have the same resources. At the end of the day, what is needed for your kid to be healthy?

Playdates- It is ideal for kids to feel they have two homes, and they are not a visitor in one home.

Encourage them to have friends over in both homes, as much as possible. Obviously, this does not always work due to geographical restrictions, but parents getting to know the friends and community can be a helpful component in providing consistency. Parents- try and take them to their friends birthday parties and events as well. Kids sometimes don't want to hurt your feelings, but generally speaking, want to go to these things with their friends. Age plays a big part on this as well. Once kids hit that 7-8 range, they may start noticing more if they are missing out on certain events.

TV/screen time/video game time- If co-parents can get on the same page with this, things can really be more smooth for your child. Screen time and video game binging is a problem in this generation. Excessive screen time is not great for mood, well being, and a host of other social emotional factors. There have been examples where kids who have screen time compulsion (spending excessive screen time each day) stopped and went on a screen time fast, and mood problems significantly reduced and attitude/behavior was much improved.

It is also important to be consistent with discipline, and to ensure that consequences are fair and

reasonable. This will help children to understand that there are still rules and expectations that need to be followed, even during a difficult time. Avoid good cop/bad cop dynamic. Happily married families still have different values and ways of looking at discipline. It is not realistic to be 100% on the same page with your spouse, co-parent, etc. But work as a team as much as possible. The best case scenario for your kid is when there is consistency between both homes, school and extracurricular events. These are WIN WINS for all involved. So what does this mean for you. When it comes to safety issues- these are non-negotiable and “hills to die on.” But other issues, work to find a middle ground.

Divorce can be a chaotic and difficult time for children. To help them cope, it is important to provide them with consistent structure and discipline. This means setting clear expectations and boundaries, and enforcing them consistently. It is also important to have a routine that is followed each day, and to provide children with a safe and secure environment. By providing consistent structure and discipline, children can feel secure and supported during a difficult time.

Create a Supportive Environment

Creating a supportive environment is critical. What is a supportive environment? Well, first, let's look at what it is not. Distrust, bullying, bad mouthing, negativity, differing forms of abuse, neglect, hostility.

“Your father is a loser.” “Your mother is a real piece of work.” “If your mother wasn’t a lying sack of (beep), you wouldn’t be so stressed.” “If your dad wasn’t constantly going to his whores and hookers, maybe you would have a good role model.” The list goes on and on. And the kid learns to compartmentalize their feelings and what they will say or not say.

This puts children in the middle of adult issues. Children do not need to be in the middle of adult issues.

“If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.”

This stuff is not rocket science. I would rather parents bite their tongues and say nothing then go on the rabbit hole of why their co-parent is an awful, horrible person.

And I understand, every situation is unique and different. Trust me, I know better than most with my work with families. But these are general themes that are true and the right thing to do

Creating a supportive environment when at events:

- Civil, cordial, kind, emotionally neutral, etc. These are the words that are used to describe co-parents who have successful experiences at sporting events, school events, graduations, weddings etc. Many kids I have worked with over the years have looming dread and anxiety about the big events in their lives. Why? Because parents are going to be there at the same time! They have learned to compartmentalize so much of their life they are dealing with the anticipation of conflict.

Why? They know how each parent feels about the other. They understand the subtle cues, the spoken feelings, etc. And they know it might get nasty.

So in creating a supportive environment, create one where your child can look back when he is 30 and say- My parents had their bumps- but I was able to focus on what was important to me and felt supported in my relationship with the other

Now some parents are able to continue to co-parent and do the events together. Mothers Day, Fathers Day, graduation meals at your favorite restaurant, even traveling together. It can happen and it does happen.

Divorce can be a difficult and chaotic time for children. It is important to create a supportive environment for them to help them cope with the changes. By keeping communication civil, maintaining a sense of normalcy and routine, and providing a safe and secure environment, parents can help keep their children out of the chaos of divorce.

Providing Proactive Emotional Support

Ongoing divorce drama leads to very bad outcomes for kids. This is obvious, right?

I always look at the big picture. No 2 people (whether married, siblings, co-parents, parent/child, boss/employee) are going to see eye to eye completely.

Take this backdrop now and think about divorce. A lot of times- whether right at the beginning of divorce, during litigation, and even post litigation, you are looking to prove your case. The case of proving you are the more emotionally fit or emotionally stable parent. And trying to prove your case sometimes means you are looking for dirt, flaws, etc towards the other parent. I understand in legal scenarios, this needs to be done at times to

PROTECT and GUARD the health and wellbeing of the child.

Children are emotionally vulnerable and sometimes pick up more than you may consider. So how do we buffer this, especially in the middle of a very stressful and sometimes chaotic situation.

How do we buffer this, even when the criticisms and flaws of the parents are TRUE.

Here are a few ideas.

Find the good in the other parent even in the midst of their poor decisions and flaws. This is a tightrope act at times. You don't want to minimize a child's concerns, especially around safety and boundary issues. But we also do not want the child to internalize a completely negative view of his/her parent. Kids are in multiple stages of development throughout their childhood. They are developing a strong sense of self. So if they see their parent as completely bad, or really bad, they will move to reject that parent out of their life. They may also reject part of themselves.

Another idea: do not minimize the feelings of your child. "Don't worry about it." "No big deal." Learn to

really help your child understand the feelings and perspective that they are going through. It is OK to support them through this process. And the reasons they may be feeling grief, loss, heartache, pain. And parents need to be able to enter into this.

But going back to the tightrope illustration, I see two things.

Kids want to protect the other parent as they sense you do not like them.

Or kids want to be heard about their negative experiences with the other parent.

With both of these scenarios- parents can work to find constructive ways to discuss the situation at hand. And remember, if this is a main and constant point of contention and discussion, we need to work to redirect to other areas of their lives.

Encourage Open Communication

Divorce can be a difficult and chaotic time for children, and it is important to provide them with support and understanding during this difficult period. One way to help kids cope with the chaos of divorce is to encourage open communication. Open

communication allows children to express their feelings and concerns in a safe and supportive environment. It also helps to build trust and understanding between parents and children, which can be beneficial in the long run. Sometimes this is a rebuilding process when trust has been damaged or lost

Parents- work to be patient and understanding when your child is expressing their feelings. This can be harder than it seems- especially when the criticism is directed at you. Stay open and work to learn from the criticism directed at you. How to do this? Keep a learning posture. You may be feeling some guilt about what your children are going through. Maybe you had a significant hand in the guilt. Maybe you feel awful knowing what your kids are hearing, what they are experiencing, what they have SEEN with their own eyes. So when your child is truly expressing their feelings, sometimes our knee jerk as parents is to get defensive. Humans naturally don't want to hear the criticism. It is easier to hear criticism about your co-parent, their family, their stuff, then to hear criticism about yourself. But mature parents are able to get over this hump. This is what you hope to be- mature, connected, vulnerable- which leads to open communication and trust.

It is also important to be honest and open with children about the changes that are happening in the family. This can help children to feel more secure and less overwhelmed by the changes.

Now the age old question on this is timing. WHEN should I tell my kids about the changes happening? The fact that we are getting 2 homes? The fact that what they have known their whole life is going to be uprooted? The when is key, and it depends on several factors. The general rule of thumb is that kids need to know WHEN their lives are going to change, and when the plan is established. Children have a tendency at times to get worked up and stressed out about the unknown. So work with them on a plan of action once the PARENTS have established the plan of action.

I am not a fan of letting kids know vague abstractions..

Additionally, it is important to provide children with resources and support to help them cope with the changes.

Examples of this include divorce care, grief counseling, individual counseling, family counseling, positive mentors, families who have been there and done that and are now on the other side of it, youth pastors, faith leaders, etc.

Many churches and community organizations have divorce care. This gives kids a place to manage the new normal, understand it, and hear that they are not alone.

Grief counseling can sometimes be exactly what is needed. To be honest- some kids are so relieved at the prospect of their parents divorce they are not in the "early stages of grief." But for many, especially when divorce is unexpected or shocking, grief counseling can be an effectively tool for a brief period of time. What to look for:

counselors who understand grief and loss.
counselors who understand complex family dynamics. Go to someone with strong experience and can get to the bottom of the issue.

Individual counseling may be appropriate when child is displaying highly anxious and/or depressive symptoms around the family loss. Think about kids who are avoiding doing what they love, not sleeping anymore, lethargic emotions, irregular eating, etc.

Family counseling is generally helpful for most families as they enter this new normal. This helps with co-parenting, boundaries, emotional reflection, keeping kids out of daily conflict, etc.

Look for families who are effectively doing the "new normal." Families with children who are adjusting well, parents who are co-parenting effectively, people who have been there and done that. This can be a helpful tool especially in the early days where things are very painful.

Encouraging open communication is an important way to help children cope with the chaos of divorce. By creating a safe and supportive environment, being honest and open with children, and providing resources and support, parents can help their children to navigate the difficult changes that come with divorce.

Managing Conflict and Stress During Divorce

Maintaining a Positive Outlook

Divorce is a difficult and chaotic process for everyone involved, especially for children. It is important to maintain a positive outlook and provide a supportive environment for children during this

difficult time. This lesson will provide tips on how to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce and help them maintain a positive outlook.

One of the challenges of maintaining a positive outlook is the grief you may feel about the divorce. This could be unwanted on your end. Or...this could be a highly conflictual situation. So the idea of feeling positive about life right now, or positive about the future may seem far reaching.

But....

kids are taking their cues from you. So how to proceed? Don't be fake, but also kids need to know that THEY are going to be ok through this process.

Set boundaries on the amount of information you are sharing. There are so many good things that they can be focusing on outside of divorce drama. Friends, school, achievements, extracurriculars, extended family, learning, etc. Don't bog them down in the negativity of the current situation.

it is important to provide children with a sense of security. Let them know that they are safe and that both parents will continue to be there for them. I understand this is not always applicable as well. But generally speaking, this is the case. Being proactive in supporting your co-parent generally helps your

kids. You are going to get a lot of advice from a lot of different sources, people, experts, etc. But do not make it complicated. Keep it simple. Keep your kids out of the drama. Keep their lives normal and consistent.

Additionally, it is important to maintain a sense of normalcy for children during a divorce. Try to keep their daily routine as consistent as possible and provide them with the same level of attention and care that they had before the divorce. Bedtime, school routine, chores, family rules, expectations, etc.

Minimizing Conflict

Divorce can be a difficult and chaotic time for children, especially if there is a lot of conflict between the parents. It is important to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce and minimize the conflict as much as possible. This lesson will provide tips on how to do this.

One of the best ways to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce is to keep them out of the middle of the conflict. This means not involving them in arguments or using them as messengers between the parents.

Most kids I have worked with really want the parents or adults to figure out the disagreements. Being a "tiebreaker" between the parents arguments can create a lot of anxiety and uncertainty for the child.

How does the child learn to navigate and have their own voice about what is important to them? But there is another issue at play with this- children are still kids- and them having "too much power" is not helpful either. So it is a balancing act. We want kids to feel empowered and speak their mind, AND we want adults to be able to make decisions that are in the best interest of the kids. This is a lot of time where conflict resides.

Families who keep their kids out of divorce chaos do a few things well. One of them is work together on managing expectations for their kids on extracurricular events.

Billy, you have basketball and Scouts this weekend? Which one do you want to do?

Billy: "hmmm...I know Dad likes basketball and Mom likes Scouts. I like them both...uh, errr, hmm, gulp."

This actually makes kids feel in the middle! Even though parents are trying to empower the child to make the decision that they want. These events are generally inconsequential for them at a younger age.

And as kids get older, they need to be making these decisions for themselves (think select sports, academic interests, etc)

Parents need to work towards a compromise position on this. Work together with coaches/leaders from both organizations to manage the situation. Present a unified front for your kid where both Mom and Dad are giving the same message. Allow the kid to know they are not choosing YOU, they are just choosing a preference and lay out the options for them. This approach is going to help them feel out of the middle.

It is also important to be aware of the language used when discussing the divorce with the children. Avoid blaming the other parent or using negative language. Instead, focus on the positives of the other parent.

Going back to theoretical example of Billy:

Mom: "Your dad is a piece of work. A real narcissist if I don't say so myself."

Billy: Thinking quietly: "What is a narcissist? that sounds bad. I don't want to be THAT."

Dad: "Your Mom talks way too much. She is so dramatic and lies all the time. Don't listen to her."

Billy: Thinking quietly: "Well, who should I listen to? this all feels so stressful."

Parents- keep the negative comments about the other parent to yourself. It may be true- but is it necessary? Maybe there are RARE cases where this could be necessary to share negative information about the other parent to protect your child- but it is definitely not the norm. It is actually more effective to stay constructive and encourage the relationship with the other parent. Now of course, if your child is being abused or actively harmed by the other parent, this strategy would not work.

Finally, it is important to maintain consistency in parenting. This means that both parents should be on the same page when it comes to rules, discipline, and expectations.

If you are not the primary parent- work with the primary parent on the expectations they have established in their home. If you are "Disney Dad" or "Fun Mom" and not the one who is doing homework, chores, school meetings, daily life- meet the other parent where the expectations are. this makes sense for several reasons. Your kid is used to the structure and accountability. Don't undermine it!

Divorce can be a difficult and chaotic time for children, but it is possible to keep them out of the chaos. By avoiding involving the children in the conflict, being aware of the language used, and maintaining consistency in parenting, parents can help minimize the conflict and keep their children out of the chaos of divorce.

Managing Stress

Divorce can be a chaotic and stressful time for children. It is important to help them manage their stress in a healthy way. In this lesson, we will discuss how to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce and how to help them manage their stress.

Let's break down what the actual stressors are for kids with divorce.

- uncertainty and lack of predictability
- intense emotional reactions
- adult messaging and complicated family dynamics

Divorce can be a difficult time for children, but it is possible to help them manage their stress in a healthy way.

Be the adults and keep things predictable as possible. Work out scheduling problems together as co-parents. Listen to your kid on what they want, but work to make the decision together. Why? Empowering a kid too much in the middle of divorce creates its own host of issues and challenges.

Intense emotional reactions generally make children feel uncertain and anxious. Talk to a friend or a therapist if you feel your co-parent is bad, mean or awful. Keep the intensity around the divorce out of your child's ears. Remember the old hymn "Be careful little ears what you hear." They don't need to understand everything, all the details, right now. This is between you and your co-parent.

Adult messaging and complicated family dynamics- this can be especially challenging with blended family situations, where several voices are in the mix. Sibling/step sibling relationships can be a

potential challenge to manage stress. One goal is to have respect for the adults in the child's life. The challenge with this approach is multiple: different parenting styles, expectations, temperaments, etc. Sometimes you are just not going to like the new step sibling, step parent, and for good reasons. But go back to the original aim: how do we keep the kids stress manageable in all of this.

When I see research that says risk of bad divorces heighten a child maladjustment risk by a lot, we need to RESET, READJUST and FOCUS on the Childs wellbeing in this time!

Final Thoughts

Wrap up and conclusion:

Divorce can be a difficult and chaotic process for everyone involved, especially for children. It is important to take the necessary steps to keep kids out of the chaos of divorce. Let's review and remember important themes around managing this time.

Communication is very important. I like Bill Eddy's work on this. Keep responses BIFF. Brief, informative, friendly and firm. Don't rehash the past. Keep the focus on the kids best interest moving forward. They will be the ones most impacted without this step.

Need to know basis. Kids need to understand what is happening. What is the plan- the expectations- how is their life going to change? Keep them informed on kid details. Adult details (litigation, child support, etc) needs to stay at the adult level.

Keep conflict low. No two people can have zero conflict. it does not happen, doesn't work, no matter how healthy they are. But working to find balance and compromise in co-parenting is a very important pillar in keeping your child out of the divorce chaos.

Routine, consistency and predictability are very important as well. Stay similar in your approaches. They don't have to be carbon copies, but stick with consistency between homes on rules and expectations.

Support and listening need to be high. The greater the grief, the stronger the need for supportive measures in the family. Listening, understanding,

hearing each other, kind hearted communication is going to keep volatility down and trust higher.

These are all pillars of successful outcomes for kids. You can do all these things and have confidence that the outcome is going to be less severe and smoother for your child.