



**PARENTS
FOREVER**

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES
IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Parents Forever
Unit - Impact of Divorce on Adults





Parents Forever Ground Rules

- This is education, not individual therapy or personal legal advice.
- Keep cell phones and pagers off during session.
- Confidentiality is observed; who is here and what is said here, stays here.
- A respectful environment will be maintained: criticizing, swearing, rudeness will not be allowed.
- Time is at a premium: each person has the right to speak briefly, no one is required to speak (right to pass).
- Congratulate yourself for coming and showing your commitment to your kids.



Main points of this session

- To help you understand the effects of divorce on your life
- To help you understand the dynamics of divorce and the fact that change is a process



.....

What are your expectations
for the Parents Forever
class?



Basic principles in every divorce

.....

- All divorces are different, yet they share common elements.
- We all have the right to the pursuit of happiness, no matter what others might say.
- Some individuals should not have married at all, should not have married each other, or should not have married when they did. When we discover this for ourselves and accept it, we can move on.
- Only the partners involved know the the whole story; other people's judgments are invalid, because they cannot possibly know what has happened.
- We cannot expect to receive permission to divorce.
- Staying together for the the sake of the children does not work.



Six stages of divorce

.....

- Emotional
- Legal
- Economic
- Parental
- Social
- Psychological

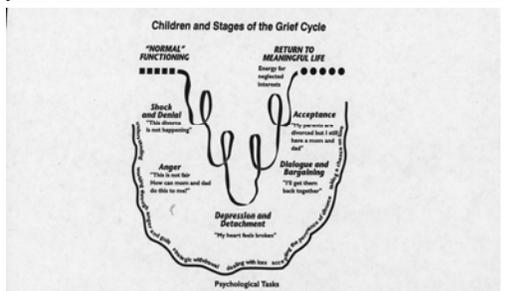


VIDEO - CYCLES

A 4:00 minute video describing the stages of grief for children going through divorce



Stages of grief and loss



Adapted from: E. Kubler-Ross, 1969. *On Death and Dying*. New York: Macmillan and Dr. Judith Graham. *Family Issues Divorce*. University of Maine Cooperative Extension, 1993

Psychological tasks for children experiencing divorce

- ➔ Understanding the divorce
- ➔ Strategic withdrawal
- ➔ Dealing with loss
- ➔ Dealing with anger
- ➔ Working out guilt
- ➔ Accepting the permanence
- ➔ Taking a chance on love



How children are affected by divorce

- They feel abandoned.
- They feel powerless and helpless.
- They have a greater need for nurturing.
- They feel angry.
- They feel guilty; they feel the divorce is their fault.
- They think they have to "take care" of their parents.
- They worry that they will be "kicked out"
- They grieve.
- They experience conflicts of loyalty.
- They "act out" in some way.



Ages and Stages

Each table has been given pictures to represent a child of a certain age.

Determine the age of your child and discuss the questions on the discussion sheet at your table.

Have someone record the discussion.



How Children are affected by Divorce Infant to 2 years

- Too young to understand what is happening
- May sense parents' stress and feel changes in daily routine
- Task: develop trust and to bond



How Children are affected by Divorce

Preschooler - ages 2 to 5

- Lack mental ability to understand what is happening
- Will be confused, angry, sad, and fearful
- May believe they are at fault
- Fantasy play will reveal fears and desires of family reunited
- May regress: bed wetting or thumb sucking



How Children are affected by Divorce

Ages 6 to 8

- Reactions include anger, grief, and a deep yearning for the departed parent
- Anger will express itself through tantrums
- May feel responsible for taking care of parents
- Children identify with both parents - DO NOT criticize other parent in front of child!



How Children are affected by Divorce

Ages 9 to 12

- Have ability to see two points of view
- Need to talk about their feelings and acknowledge anger
- May identify "good guy"/"bad guy"; focused on what's "right and fair"
- Puberty makes it difficult to be separated from same-sex parent
- Likely to manipulate and play games with parents



How Children are affected by Divorce

Adolescence - ages 13 to 18.....



- More developed socially and emotionally-peers are primary orientation
- Lack of consistency in discipline and control is unsettling - "growing up too fast"
- May act out anger and frustration through delinquency, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity
- Honest communication helps teens see both sides of issue - without involving them in inappropriate "adult issues"

How Children are affected by Divorce

Emerging Adulthood - 18 to 25..

- Accelerated independence - growing up faster
- Early departure from family to avoid conflict
- Involvement with alcohol, drugs or inappropriate sexual behavior to "escape" pain
- Loss of "Home"



What affects a child's adjustment to divorce?

- The level of conflict
- A stable environment
- Maintaining relationships
- Compassionate listening



Changes

- **Abrupt change** focuses on a change that is not predictable.
- **Continuous change** builds on what you know.



VIDEO - GAMES PARENTS PLAY

A 5:47 MINUTE VIDEO THAT LOOKS AT WAYS PARENTS UNDERMINE EACH OTHER AND PUT THE CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CONFLICT



Things Divorced Parents Say to Confuse and Undermine a Child's Love and Confidence

- I need you to listen to my feelings and be sympathetic
- Tell your mother/father to buy it for you
- This divorce is your mother's/father's fault
- You can always go live with your mother/father if you don't like it here
- Don't tell your mother/father about this



Are you alienating your children from the other parent?

- Do you deny the existence of the other parent?
- Do you criticize the other parent?
- Do you place your children in the middle?
- Do you set the other parent up to fail?



LET
CHILDREN
BE
CHILDREN



I blew it!



**VIDEO -
OWNING YOUR FEELINGS**

A 3:53 MINUTE VIDEO ON "I" MESSAGES
AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
STRATEGIES

Pay attention to the tones used in
"I" and "You" statements.
Does that make a difference?



Problem Solving

Baseball Method



"I" messages vs. "YOU" messages

✦ *"You are always planning something on my weekends with Kaci."*

✦ *I feel angry when you plan activities during the time I'm supposed to spend with Kaci. I miss spending time with her. Would you please try to avoid scheduling things for her during my weekend?"*



"I" messages vs. "YOU" messages

Feelings of the Speaker:

I feel _____

Action of the Listener:

When you _____

Consequences of the behavior:

because _____

Request for Change:

Would you please _____ ?



Practicing "I" Messages



Using "I" Messages Vs.

"You" Messages

- "I" delivers high powered messages in a productive way
- "I" expresses my feelings as my own and relate those feelings to another's *behavior*... NOT the *person*
- "You" messages = put downs or solutions
- "I" messages = honesty and builds trust



ACTIVE LISTENING

STOP TALKING
Concentrate

Relax

Make eye contact

STOP TALKING



Main Points of Part 2

- Children need the involvement of both parents in their lives
- Divorce creates an opportunity for parents to develop new parenting skills that will improve their relationship with their children
- Discipline is very important during this time, and there are many tools for parents to work with



Children's Rights When Their Parents Divorce

- Meaningful relationships with both parents
- Remain separate from parents' differences
- Love both parents
- Receive love and support from both parents
- Be physically and emotionally safe
- Express feelings regardless of parents' viewpoint
- Be children, independent of the adult world of divorce



Your Role as a Parent

- You are a parent – the greatest possible asset a child can have.
- You are here because you are a parent and the parenting responsibilities are FOREVER.
- Concentrate on what you can do rather than on what the other parent should do.
- Children with two supportive parents who are willing to address their children's needs and resolve conflict in healthy ways are more likely to have a positive adjustment to the divorce.



When discipline is needed

Discipline

- A positive way to teach a child self-control and confidence
- Teaches a child what to do
- The focus is on how a child will behave in the future
- Children learn to control their own behavior

Punishment

- One technique used in discipline
- Teaches a child what not to do
- The focus is on how a child behaved in the past
- Children learn that others control their behavior



VIDEO - PARENTING STYLES

A 2:01 MINUTE VIDEO THAT DISCUSSES THREE COMMON PARENTING STYLES

Note: If you have more than one child do you use more than one parenting style?



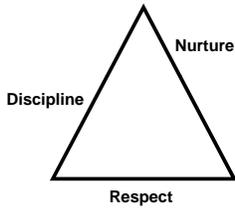
Parenting Styles

- **Autocratic or authoritarian**
 - Parents have total control
 - Parents are all-powerful
 - Children cannot question parents' authority
- **Permissive**
 - There are no limits or rules for children
 - Children have all the power
 - Children have little respect for order or routine
- **Respectful, positive or democratic**
 - There is a balance between individual freedom, the rights of others, and the responsibilities of everyone.
 - Parents are leaders who encourage cooperation and learning
 - Families have order and routine, and every person is important



Parenting Styles

Positive Parenting



Discipline-You are a teacher – you let your children know how you expect them to behave, set and enforce limits, and monitor their behavior

Nurture- You provide love and reassurance to build a strong relationship with your child

Respect – You model the respect you expect from your child, are fair and allow your child to express their thoughts and beliefs



Different Parenting Styles Can Cause Conflict Between Parents.....

Keep in mind:

- You can only control your own parenting style
- Ideally you will have similar rules and expectations, but this is not always possible
- Your child will do better if at least one parent uses a Positive Parenting style

Your child needs you to:

- Love them unconditionally
- Set rules and have high expectations for their behavior
- Monitor their activities and friends
- Be a role model for how to deal with conflict, stress and communication in your relationship with the other parent



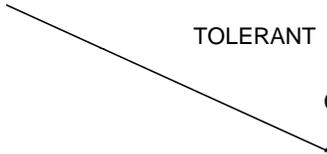
Why children misbehave

- ✦ They are looking for attention
- ✦ They are imitating or modeling a parent's behavior
- ✦ They are testing the parent
- ✦ They are standing up for themselves
- ✦ They are protecting themselves
- ✦ They feel bad about themselves
- ✦ They are hungry, tired, or sick



The Range of Post-Divorce Parenting Relationships

CONFLICTUAL



TOLERANT

COOPERATIVE



VIDEO - PARALLEL PARENTING

A 1:24 MINUTE VIDEO DESCRIBING PARALLEL PARENTING



Case Studies

.....
How different parents handle conflict



Parallel-Parenting Business Principles.....

- Act reasonably
- Be flexible
- Make sensible, logical decisions
- Avoid conflict
- Control negative emotions
- Act in good faith
- Focus on children's needs above your own
- Value both parents remaining involved in the children's lives



What should be in a Parenting Plan?.....

- Residential arrangements
- Parenting time schedule
- Medical care
- Communication with school
- Religion and cultural heritage
- Legal custody defined
- Vacations
- Participation in activities
- Plans for ongoing parent-child contact
- Child care arrangements
- Family connections
- How parents will communicate
- Transportation
- Financial responsibility
- How the agreement will be changed



You help your children most when you work cooperatively with the other parent to raise your children



By focusing on your children, you are focusing on your family and your future





PARENTS FOREVER

EDUCATION FOR FAMILIES
IN DIVORCE TRANSITION

Parents Forever

Unit - *Pathways to a New Life*



NDSU
Extension Service
North Dakota State University

College of Education
Ecology

Department of Management
Extension

Main points of this session

- Suggest possible changes you may need to make in order to move on in your life.
- Discuss pathways you might take as you move on in your life.



Essential elements for a new life

- ➔ Letting go
- ➔ Redefining parental roles
- ➔ Developing new social ties



How new relationships affect children

- ➔ They have to give up the fantasy of getting their parents back together
- ➔ They may be threatened because they fear sharing the parent with another person
- ➔ A new relationship may undermine the security they are just beginning to redevelop after their parents' separation
- ➔ Children may feel guilty about liking a parent's new friend