



# CHILDREN & DIVORCE



- **Are you and your spouse going through a divorce?**
  - **Are your children having a hard time dealing with it?**
- Your family is not alone.* More than one million children experience the divorce of their parents every year.

## How Does Divorce Affect Children?

Significant family changes like divorce can have a big impact on children of all ages—from infants to teenagers. Though all children react differently, your child's reaction may include some of the following.

- **INFANTS** may be fussy, cry more often or have trouble sleeping. Changes in surroundings, schedules and caretakers can be stressful for young children, affecting sleeping patterns, and development.
- **TODDLERS** are not able to understand abstract concepts yet, so words like "marriage" and "divorce" will not help them understand what you are doing. They may become sad or withdrawn or act out their anxiety by biting or hitting.
- **PRESCHOOLERS** are at an age when they often fear the divorce is their fault. They may also worry that the parent they are still living with will also leave them, even if they are just leaving to run an errand or go to work. They may also find ways to act out sadness or anxiety.
- **GRADE-SCHOOLERS** may also blame themselves for the divorce, and often act out by withdrawing or being aggressive at school.

**As a parent, it is important to help your children understand and adapt to your divorce. Children of all ages need to be reassured that the divorce is not their fault and that both parents will always love them, even if they are not living with them.**

## Help Your Children Deal With Your Divorce:

**Actions Speak Louder Than Words:** You may say "Daddy (or Mommy) still loves you very much," but be sure that the child also sees his other parent on a regular basis and is shown how much both parents still care for him.

**Watch What You Say:** Stress, anger and other negative emotions are easily transferred from parent to child. Do not express negative feelings (such as anger, resentment and jealousy) or speak badly about your ex-spouse in front of your children. If you need to speak to someone about your feelings, get in touch with another adult and spare your children the excess frustration.

**Keep the Lines of Communication Open:** Your children will be watching you closely to see how your relationship changes during a divorce. It is crucial—for your children's happiness and security—that you and your ex-spouse continue to communicate. This will help instill a sense of security during an otherwise frightening time of change.

## Special Challenges for Families with Divorced Parents

- **Discipline** can be harder than usual when children are getting used to two different households with two different set of rules. Practice teamwork whenever possible, coordinating rules and punishments. In any case, be consistent with your own rules, especially when certain rules apply only in your home. Children like to test their limits, and it's your job to set them and stick to them.
- **Scheduling** is another issue that needs to be addressed. Develop a schedule that works for you and your children, and then make it easy to understand for everyone. Create a calendar for both houses marking when the children will be with each parent. Changes in schedule can be stressful for even the youngest child, so a simple, consistent schedule will help them better adjust to the change.

**REMEMBER: Divorce is an ongoing process that can be difficult for everyone involved. Stay focused on your children's needs during and after the divorce, reassuring them that they are not the reason for the divorce and are still loved by both parents.**



Parenting can be tough, but asking for help doesn't have to be.  
*If you need help with other parenting challenges, reach out!*

Call 1-800-CHILDREN or visit us online at  
[www.scanva.org](http://www.scanva.org)



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