

# Training Manual for Florida's Supervised Visitation Programs

## CHAPTER

### THE IMPACT OF DIVORCE AND SEPARATION ON FAMILIES

#### Case Scenario

David and Marie divorced four months ago, which resulted in high levels of tension over parenting time for their eight-year-old Charlie. After an allegation that David had a substance abuse problem, a court referral was made for supervised visitation. David is unhappy with this decision because he believes that he is being unfairly treated for initiating the divorce. Marie is frustrated because of the time and finances it will take to bring Charlie to the Visitation center. They have moved into a small apartment and she is trying to make ends meet with her single salary. Charlie has expressed fear of the supervised visitation center and just wants to go back to living in his old house. He is excited to see his father and misses him, but feels bad about that because he has heard his mother say mean things about him.

*The visit monitor hears the following conversation as Charlie walks in with his mother.*

Charlie: But why can't we just visit Dad at the house.

Marie: Sweetie, your Dad doesn't want us at his house, that's why he kicked us out, remember?

Charlie: But he told me that he wanted me to come over so we could play catch.

Marie: Well sometimes Dad makes promises he can't keep and you're just going to have to get used to coming here, okay? Maybe you guys can do something different here!

*The visit monitor steps in and leads Charlie to the visit room*

David: Buddy! I'm so glad to see you!

Charlie: Me too Dad! I wish we could be at our house. I don't want me and mom to live away from you.

David: I know, but things are different now. And meeting at this place is all your Mom's fault. She's messed everything up!

*After completion of this chapter, you will be able to answer the following questions:*

- What are some problems in this scenario?
- What can you do to help the mother in this situation?
- What are some ways that you can help the father become less frustrated?
- What are some activities that the parent and child can do during the visitation?
- How can you ease the child's anxiety about the supervised visitation center?
- How can you talk to both parents about their conversations with their child?

## Introduction

Divorce can be difficult for the whole family. It is important for supervised visitation providers as well as parents to understand the potential impact a divorce can have on each family member. This can allow for supportive measures to be put into place to limit those negative impacts and to provide for continuing healthy growth and development of children throughout and after a divorce.



## What will I learn in this chapter?

This chapter provides an overview of the impact of divorce and separation on children and families.

After reading this chapter, a visit monitor will be able to:

- Discuss the prevalence of divorce in the US;
- Understand the impact of divorce on children of different ages;
- Recognize how and why children view divorce as loss and may experience grief;
- Understand how divorce/separation may affect a child's behavior during visits;
- Describe co-parenting and assist parents in understanding co-parenting behavior;
- Identify co-parenting legal terms;
- Understand the basics of Child Support
- Describe Florida's laws relating to divorce and custody and explain how judicial decisions on parental responsibility can impact visitation; and
- Pinpoint strategies to facilitate visits between parent and child in divorce/separation cases.



### REMINDER:

The better trained you are on these subjects, the more comfortable you will feel when working with families and children experiencing divorce.

## Snapshots

### Did You Know?

- Of the children in the United States, 35%, or about 25 million children under the age of 18, live in single-parent homes.
- Today, 42% of adults have a step relationship – either a stepparent, a step or half-sibling, or a stepchild. This translates to 95.5 million adults.

In the United States, first marriages end in divorce between 40% and 50% of the time. According to the 2011 US Census Bureau, around 21% of men and 22% of women have been divorced. In first marriages, the average age of divorce is between 30 and 31.

## Effects on Children

Divorce is a trauma that affects the entire family. It's important for parents to understand how their children may be affected so that they can comfort them and support them. This section explores the different ways divorce may affect children in different age groups, and what supervised visitation workers and parents can do to support children at visits and at home.

## Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Children

Studies on the long-term effects of divorce on children years after their parents divorced found that children of divorce showed higher rates of the following:

### Physical Effects

- Poor physical health in general
- Higher rates of asthma
- Higher incidence of headaches



### REMEMBER!

Parents should understand that they can support their children through this process to lessen the impact of divorce.

### Academic Effects

- Poorer performance in school
- Lower rates of academic achievement
- Less likely to graduate high school
- Less likely to go to college
- Less likely to graduate from college

### Psychological/Emotional Effects

- Increased anxiety and depression
- Long-term feelings of anger, hostility, and loneliness
- Long-term fear of being abandoned and lack of trust in others
- Difficulty experiencing grief and loss
- Less satisfaction with their lives overall

### DID YOU KNOW?

Some of these characteristics or changes with children could become apparent in the visitation center. Together, parents and visit monitors can take steps to improve the parent-child relationship.

### Interpersonal/Social Effects

- Increased rates of divorce for the children when they become adults
- Higher rates of unmarried women becoming pregnant
- Trouble committing or engaging in intimate relationships
- Early engagement in sexual relationships
- Less contact with parents

### Developmental Needs of Children & Responses to Separation or Divorce

Children have different needs at different stages of development. In this section, children's needs during the respective stages of development are grouped as follows:

- Infants
- Toddlers
- Young Children
- Older Children
- Adolescents

#### Effects of Divorce on Infants (0 – 18 months)

During infancy, children learn to trust their caregivers and form attachments. At this age, infants can sense conflict, but cannot understand it. When a divorce occurs, an infant will not understand the change, but he or she will be able to sense the conflict, emotions, and a parent's lack of presence in the home. It is important help comfort the infant in this stressful time.



#### **The effects of divorce in infants include:**

- Constant irritability and crying (more than usual)
- Becoming extremely upset and inconsolable
- Clinginess with caregivers
- Regressive behaviors (behaviors they had previously grown out of)

What Infants Need	How Parents Can Help the Child
Consistency	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being consistent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need to make sure to keep the infant on a routine. Meal times, sleep times, and other routines should be maintained to make sure the infant doesn't experience too much change.</li> <li>• Parents should make every effort to keep the child in a familiar environment. If a parent must move, both parents should help the child become comfortable with the new environment by bringing something comforting from the home the child finds comforting.</li> </ul>
Support	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Remaining calm</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, parents should have the infant maintain consistent contact with both parents.</li> <li>• Parents should avoid having tense interactions with each other in front of the infant. Even though infants may not understand what is being said, they do understand when tension and conflict are present. Parents should have calm interactions when their child is present.</li> </ul>
Comfort	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being reassuring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should physically comfort the child through cuddling, holding, hugs, and similar physical affection.</li> <li>• During transitions from one parent's house to the supervised visitation center, parents should remember to keep an item the infant finds comforting with him or her, such as a special toy, a blanket, or other object.</li> </ul>

***Seek additional help if the supervised visitation worker notices or receives information about a child's***

- 1. loss of learned skills, including losing the ability to eat, talk, or crawl, or*
- 2. a heightened emotional reactivity, such as anger, fear, or withdrawal that continues for days or multiple sessions, this can indicate a warning for psychological distress.*

**Monitors should get help from a manager or supervisor if this occurs.**

## Effects of Divorce on Toddlers (18 months – 3 years)

Toddlers will have a better understanding of what is happening during a divorce than an infant, but still won't understand all of the different ways divorce will affect him or her. Toddlers will have a difficult time understanding the future following a divorce. Toddlers can sense a parent's absence, conflict, and emotions.

### **The effects of divorce in toddlers include:**

- Being fussy or crying more often than usual
- Aggressive behavior
- Problems with sleeping
- Feelings neglected or ignored
- Regressive behavior (behaviors they had previously grown out of)
- Clinginess with caregivers
- Feelings of fear, anger, or shyness



<b>How Toddlers May Feel</b>	<b>How Parents Can Help the Child</b>
Confused	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being consistent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents should try and keep consistent schedules so the child can anticipate what will happen in the future.</li><li>• Although divorce is a major change, parents should avoid other major changes to the toddler's life when in the midst of a divorce. If possible, parents should avoid changing schools, homes, rooms, or other things that the child is comfortable with.</li></ul>
Unloved	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Showing love</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents need to show the child frequent affection – both in action and words. Hugging the child and telling him or her that he or she is loved allows the child to feel loved and secure.</li><li>• Make sure that the toddler spends time individually with both parents, if possible, to help him or her feel loved and safe in his or her relationship with each parent.</li></ul>



Scared	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Comforting their child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need to allow the child to take time when transitioning from one parent’s home to the supervised visitation center. If the child needs more time to say goodbye to one parent, the other parent should try to accommodate the child.</li> <li>• Both parents need to remember to be patient with the child. The child may become needy because he or she is scared of all the changes. Parents need to take the time to comfort the child and make an effort to ease any fears the toddler may have.</li> </ul>
Sad	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being reassuring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to help a toddler with his or her feelings, parents should also take care of themselves. Parents should seek out help and support while going through this process and then they will be better able to help their toddlers. Toddlers can sense when their parents are upset and sad, and they will become sad when they see that a parent is sad.</li> <li>• Parents should allow the child to bring comfort items, such as toys or blankets, with him or her when going in for supervised visitation.</li> </ul>

***Seek additional help if the supervised visitation worker notices or receives information about a child’s***

- 1. loss of learned skills, including losing the ability to eat, talk, crawl, using the toilet, or walk, or*
- 2. a heightened emotional reactivity, such as anger, fear, or withdrawal that continues for multiple sessions this can indicate a warning for psychological distress.*

**Monitors should get help from a manager or supervisor if this occurs.**

**Effects of Divorce on Young Children (4 – 7 years)**

Young children have difficulty understanding divorce; however, they are aware of the concept of their parents as a unit. When divorce happens, a young child may have a hard time understanding, and may become upset by the idea of his or her parents no longer being together. Children in this age group may also start to believe that they are responsible for their parents’ divorce.



**The effects of divorce on young children include:**

- Trouble sleeping and frequent nightmares
- Feelings of fear
- Problems making new friends
- Daydreaming and pretending (more than normal), sometimes focused on the parents getting back together

How Young Children May Feel	How Parents Can Help the Child
Worried	<p><b>Talk to their child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After a divorce, the child may be worried that he or she will never see one of the parents. Parents should affirm to the child that he or she will still be in contact with both parents and is still loved by both parents.</li> <li>• Parents should explain to children how things will change, so that the child will understand and not worry about the future. When a schedule or home situation changes, parents should sit down with the child and discuss these changes and answer any questions.</li> </ul>
Guilty	<p><b>Explain that it’s not their child’s fault</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children at this age will often blame themselves for the divorce, so it is important for parents to continually explain to the child that it is NOT his or her fault. Divorce is the choice of the parents.</li> <li>• Parents need to avoid arguments, tense situations, or disagreements in front of the child, especially when the child is the focus of the discussion.</li> </ul>

Rejected	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Telling the child that both parents love him/her</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child may feel that when one parent leaves, he or she is rejecting the child. It's important to remind the child constantly of how loved he or she is by both parents.</li> <li>• Parents should help the child to maintain regular contact with both parents. This can be done by phone calls, time together, online communication, and other methods.</li> </ul>
Confused	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Keeping things simple</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents need to explain clearly and periodically to the child what is happening. Children should understand how their lives will change and what is expected of them.</li> <li>• Children may sometimes believe their parents will get back together. Parents should make it clear that the divorce means that the parents will no longer be together.</li> </ul>
Unable to define feelings	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Discussing the child's feelings together</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger children may have difficulty expressing their feelings surrounding the divorce. It's important for parents to engage the children in discussion of how they're feeling and help them name those feelings.</li> <li>• Parents can use books, games, or other media options that can help a child learn to name the emotions he or she is feeling. Parents can also seek out help from a child therapist to help the child as he or she deals with emotions.</li> </ul>

**Seek additional if** the supervised visitation worker notices or receives information about a child's

1. *Loss of learned skills, including losing the ability to talk or using "baby talk", bedwetting, or antisocial behavior, failure to progress further developmentally, or*
2. *Expressing anger, extreme sadness, or aggression, this can all indicate a warning for psychological distress in children.*

**Monitors should get help from a manager or supervisor if this occurs.**

**Effects of Divorce on Older Children (8 – 12 years)**

Unlike younger children, older children have a better understanding of what divorce is. It is common for older children to blame one parent for the divorce and pick a side in the dispute. One of the primary reactions older children have to divorce is feeling anger – towards the situation and the parents.

**The effects of divorce on older children include:**

- Anger manifesting in different ways, such as fighting or disrespect of the parents
- Headaches, stomachaches, or other illnesses
- School problems and not wanting to attend school
- Withdrawing from friend groups due to embarrassment, feeling isolated, and sadness



How Older Children May Feel	How Parents Can Help the Child
Worried	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Talk to the child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older children have a better understanding of divorce and may worry about the financial and emotional burden divorce may put on the parents. Parents should make an effort to not complain about the divorce, their finances, or the other parent in front of the child so he or she does not worry.</li> <li>• Sometimes parents will send messages through a child. This may make children nervous about passing along messages and worried about upsetting the other parent. Parents should avoid sending messages to each other through a child.</li> </ul>
Isolated	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connect with child</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents can encourage the child to join school and group activities. Parents can help the child find something he or she is interested in and look for a group to join.</li> <li>• A child may feel isolated from other extended family members in a divorce as well. These people may potentially serve as a support system. It’s important for parents to explain to the child that he or she is still a part of the same family, even if the divorce is changing the parents’ relationship.</li> </ul>

<p>Insecure</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Help the child feel secure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children can become insecure following a divorce; they may feel unloved and unsure of their future. Parents should make an effort to provide the child with stability and consistent love and affection so that the child can start to feel secure in the new arrangement.</li> <li>• Parents should go over the child’s new schedule and transitions with him or her. If the child has any questions, the parents should try to answer them. If the child has any concerns, the parents should try to ease them.</li> </ul>
<p>They have to choose sides</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Never make the child choose sides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During divorce, children may feel as if they have to choose sides. This is dangerous to the goals of co-parenting and to the relationship between the other parent and the child. Parents should continually emphasize to the child that he or she does not have to choose sides and that the decision to divorce was a mutual decision.</li> <li>• Parents should not express jealousy to the child when the child spends time with the other parent. Instead, parents should show the child they are happy the child is having a chance to bond with the other parent.</li> </ul>

***Seek additional help if the supervised visitation worker notices or receives information about a child’s***

- 1. sleep complaints, headaches and stomachaches,*
  - 2. antisocial behavior, or*
  - 3. anger and hostility directed toward someone or something else,*
- this can all indicate a warning of psychological distress for this age group.*

**Monitors should get help from a manager or supervisor if this occurs.**

**Effects of Divorce on Adolescents (13 – 17 years)**

Adolescents go through many social, emotional, and physical changes. When a divorce occurs, the adolescent may feel even more overwhelmed by the great changes. While adolescents often put on a brave face and act as though the divorce doesn't affect them, they are affected just like children of other age groups. Following a divorce, adolescents may respond in a variety of ways.



**The effects of divorce on adolescents include:**

- Personality changes that include heightened feelings of anger, resentment, and sadness
- Acting out and disobeying parents, such as refusing to following plans that had been established
- Increased desire to be independent and more actions indicating independence
- Isolating him or herself from family and friends
- Engaging in riskier behavior

How Older Adolescent May Feel	How Parents Can Help the Adolescent
Angry	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Talk to the adolescent</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should make the effort to understand that the adolescent may be angry. His or her life has been drastically changed, and it wasn't his or her choice. Parents should try to understand that anger is normal and allow the adolescent the vent anger in healthy ways. Parents may also look for a counselor or support group for adolescents that specializes in divorce as an outlet for the adolescent to vent that frustration.</li> <li>• Parents should talk to their adolescent! Opening up the lines of communication helps to decrease the amount of conflict, while also showing the adolescent that his or her opinions matter.</li> <li>• Parents should not talk about the details of the divorce with the adolescent. Learning more about the disagreements may make the adolescent angrier and cause him or her to be upset at one or both of the parents.</li> </ul>

Burdened	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Never make the adolescent choose sides</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes during a divorce, parents may try to be the adolescent’s friend rather than parent. This may include complaining to the adolescent about the other parent, like one would to a friend. Parents should make sure they maintain the appropriate parental boundaries with adolescents so the adolescent doesn’t feel like he or she needs to take care of the parent.</li> <li>• Parents should do their best to allow the adolescent to remain an adolescent. During divorce, some adolescents may feel like they have to grow up and take over the responsibility left by the parent who has left. Parents should make sure to not place adult responsibilities on the adolescent during this time of transition and change.</li> </ul>
Out of control	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tell the adolescent what to expect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents should make an effort to keep the adolescent’s schedule as stable and consistent as it can be. Just as with younger children, adolescents need consistency during this period of change.</li> <li>• Parents should clearly communicate with the adolescent so that he or she knows what to expect. During this time, adolescents may feel like they have no control over anything. Being informed will help the adolescent feel in control because he or she will know how things will change and what will be happening in the future.</li> <li>• Parents should make an effort to give the adolescent control over as much as possible, within reason.</li> </ul>

***Seek additional help if*** it is more difficult to identify distress in adolescents due to the common occurrences of mood swings and behavioral difficulties, but the most common red flags are the adolescent engaging in alcohol, drugs, or other dangerous activity, anger, verbal hostility, or physical aggression, and depression, which can be identified through irritability, feelings of worthlessness, depressed mood, difficulty concentrating, poor appetite, and fatigue. **All of these red flags for distress could indicate a need for professional help.**

**Table X.X**  
**How Divorce May Affect Children at Supervised Visitation**

Needs	Responses to Separation or Divorce	Behavior that may be Observed During Visits
<p><b><u>Infants</u></b></p> <p>Connection and attachment to caregiver</p> <p>Safe environment</p> <p>Consistent eating and sleeping pattern</p> <p>Frequent time with parents, length of time can be shorter</p>	<p>If child is less than 6 months, divorce will most likely not affect the child if his/her needs are still met</p> <p>Infants over 6 months experience separation anxiety if they have formed a secure attachment with their caregivers and may fear abandonment</p>	<p>Developmentally inappropriate behavior</p> <p>Becomes upset easily</p> <p>Ill-tempered/cries easily</p> <p>Demonstrates insecure attachment</p> <p>Emotionally withdrawn or shy</p>
<p><b>Toddlers</b></p> <p>A safe environment for exploration</p> <p>Parent attentive to needs</p> <p>Verbal explanations appropriate for age</p> <p>A patient caregiver</p> <p>Consistent daily routine</p>	<p>Toddler may fear separation</p> <p>Toddler may fear abandonment</p>	<p>Becomes upset easily/ill-tempered and cries/whines</p> <p>Physically hangs on to parent</p> <p>Emotionally withdrawn</p> <p>Throws temper tantrums</p> <p>Shows aggressive behavior (hitting, biting, kicking, scratching, etc.)</p>
<p><b>Young Children</b></p> <p>Protective parent</p> <p>Freedom to explore</p> <p>Defined roles for parent</p> <p>Contact with other children for socialization and play</p> <p>To show autonomy and mastery</p>	<p>Blames self for parents' problems</p> <p>Feels guilty or ashamed</p> <p>Fears punishment or rejection</p> <p>Feels frightened or confused</p> <p>Has fantasies of parental reconciliation</p> <p>Feels jealous</p> <p>May regress to an earlier age</p>	<p>Difficulty expressing feelings</p> <p>Acts younger than true age</p> <p>Toileting accidents</p> <p>Fights with siblings</p>



<p><b>Older Children</b></p> <p>To be shielded from parental conflict and negativity</p> <p>To be talked with and listened to</p> <p>Contact with both parents</p> <p>To be involved at school</p> <p>Parents to be involved at school</p> <p>Support from friends</p> <p>Developed sense of competence</p>	<p>Feelings of sadness or anxiety</p> <p>Feelings of guilt or fear</p> <p>Feelings of shame or low self-esteem</p> <p>Has fantasies of parental reconciliation</p> <p>Experiences loyalty conflicts</p> <p>Believes parents are all good or all bad</p> <p>Feelings of anger</p>	<p>Unable to express feelings</p> <p>Gets frustrated</p> <p>Shows hostility towards others</p> <p>Acts younger than true age</p> <p>Acts older than true age</p>
<p><b>Adolescents</b></p> <p>Parents to be emotionally stable</p> <p>Low levels of parental conflict</p> <p>Parents to act mature</p> <p>Parental supervision</p> <p>Quality time with both parents</p> <p>To be treated as an individual</p> <p>To achieve emotional independence from caregivers and other adults</p> <p>To prepare for economic independence</p>	<p>Feelings of sadness or depression</p> <p>Feelings of anger or disappointment</p> <p>Feelings of self-doubt</p> <p>Lacks self-esteem</p> <p>Shows parental behavior</p> <p>Emotionally unbalanced</p> <p>Partakes in sexual behavior prematurely</p> <p>May feel relieved parents are divorced</p>	<p>Insincere disconnection or apathy</p> <p>Expresses sadness, anger, shame and/or disgust</p> <p>Questions family relationships</p> <p>Pulls away from family</p>

## Divorce as Loss

Divorce is a loss of the current family structure. Parents and children can feel loss over changes that occur in their homes, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, schedules, routines, roles, expectations and family structure. Processing these changes, and the grief associated with the losses, is necessary for family members to move forward.



Parents need to keep communication open with their child about the changes that are taking place so that he or she is able to express and discuss grief and sadness. Although many changes and losses occur in divorce, the parental role is a permanent role that does not change. The grief that children and parents feel over separation and divorce is more of a process than a time-limited event. Parents should remember that throughout this process, children are depending on their parents for their needs to be met. It is crucial to help parents understand that their responsibilities to their children remain constant, regardless of the separation or divorce.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The 5 Stages of Grief identified by Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, a Swiss psychologist, may be seen in children after their parents' divorce. Examples of a child's thoughts, following the 5 stages are as follows:

1. **Denial**
  - "No, it's not true!"
2. **Anger**
  - "This shouldn't be happening to me."
3. **Bargaining**
  - "Maybe I can change things if I do better."
4. **Depression**
  - "I don't know how to keep going."
5. **Acceptance**
  - "I will be okay."

## Effects on the Parents

Divorce can affect many areas of parents' lives. It is important for parents to foster a strong support system for themselves and their children during this time. The following are a few areas of life that are most commonly impacted by divorce.

Remember that all families are unique and these effects may not affect all families in the same way.

### Economic Stability

#### *Economic Adjustments*

Divorce usually requires an economic adjustment of lowering a single parent's standard of living due to the loss of financial support from a former spouse. Research shows that in order to maintain the same living standards as before, the average parent's income would have to increase by 30%.

#### *Decrease in Overall Income*

Studies have shown that the rate of women who live in poverty after divorce is four times higher than that of married couples because they are often paid less than men and may be responsible for a higher amount of the childcare responsibilities. Men also experience a loss in their standard of living, ranging from 10%-40%. This can be a result of the amount of child support required or a result of the lack of extra financial assistance from an ex-spouse who worked outside of the home.



### Possible Economic Adjustments

- Move into a smaller home
- Learn to keep a budget
- Switch to basic cable and internet
- Become aware of where money is being spent
  - Make sure lights are turned off when no one is in the room
  - Unplug appliances that are not in use
  - Turn up the thermostat when no one is in the house
- Save gas by walking or biking
- Utilize hand-me-down clothing and toys
- Shop at thrift stores
- Pool resources for expensive childcare items, such as strollers and cribs, with family and friends.
- Cook at home more

Reach out to community services to help parents learn to adjust to the financial impact of divorce.

*Financial Burden*

The legal costs of divorce alone can be more than \$20,000. Individuals will undergo many expenses to start over. Some of these expenses include rent deposit fees, moving costs, utilities deposits, etc.

Divorce can create a financial burden for both parties. Parents experiencing a divorce should use this information to prepare and prevent instability from occurring, which will protect the children.



**Mental and Emotional Health**



The emotional strain of asking for a divorce, or feeling blindsided by a divorce request, can take a toll on a person’s mental health. Divorced individuals who need extra help should consider seeing a mental health professional to process their emotions and learn healthy coping skills. Below are some emotions commonly experienced by adults during a divorce:

<b>Mental and Emotional Health Concerns</b>	
Lack of confidence	Feeling unworthy, not good enough, having low self-esteem
Depression	Overwhelming sadness, extreme fatigue, little desire to do anything
Difficulty focusing	Dwelling on the divorce and what went wrong in the marriage, unable to concentrate on other tasks; difficulty accomplishing things
Anger	Being upset at former partner, losing temper over little things, loss of control, severe frustration

## Physical Health

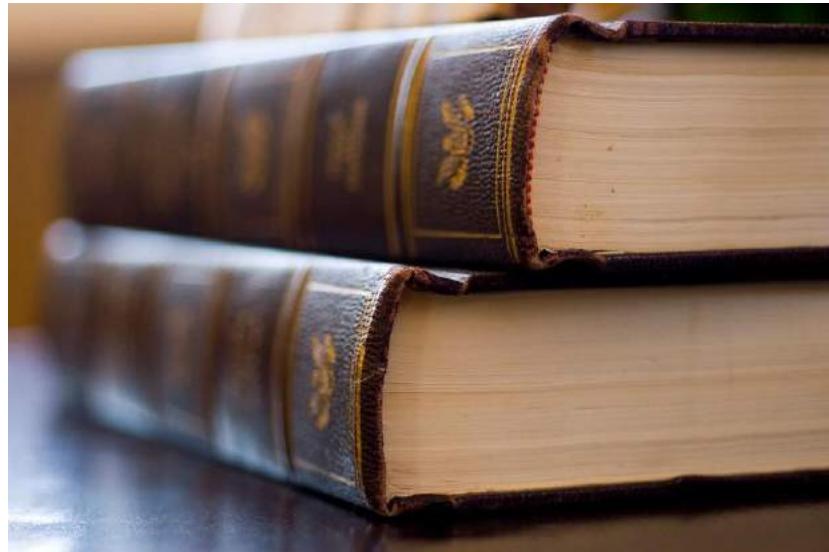
### *Physical Manifestations of Stress*

The stress of divorce can contribute to a weakened immune system, creating a greater likelihood of frequent illness. Some people experience depression and anxiety. Others engage in unhealthy risk-taking behaviors. Parents should pay attention to their own physical health during a divorce. They should get enough sleep, limit their alcohol use, and eat nutritious food, as well as consult a medical professional for help dealing with the physical effects of divorce.

## Common Legal Terms of Divorce

The following list contains common legal terms used in divorce/separation cases.

**Alternative Dispute Resolution or ADR** - Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) refers to a variety of processes that help parties resolve disputes without a trial. Typical ADR processes include mediation, arbitration, neutral evaluation, and collaborative law. These processes are generally confidential, less formal, and less stressful than traditional court proceedings. Mediation is the form of ADR most common to divorce disputes.



**Adjudication** – adjudication or litigation refers to the process of taking a case through court and getting a final decision by a judge or jury.

### STOP and Think

- Why is it important for visit monitors to know common legal terms of divorce?
- What are ways you can help families by knowing legal terms?

**Child Custody Evaluation** – is a process in which a mental health expert evaluates the family and makes a recommendation to the court for custody or parenting plan that is in the child's best interest.

**Child Support** - A court-ordered payment from one parent of a minor child to the other in order to assist in the expenses associated with raising the child.

**Confidentiality** – Generally, court proceedings are public matters. In the vast majority of jurisdictions, this includes divorce proceedings. This means that unless the court agrees to file divorce records under seal, filings in divorce proceedings

become matters of public record. Exceptions to open court records exist including the identification of children and victims of sexual abuse, amongst others. In most places, however, to protect divorce records from being open to the public, one or both participants must ask the court to file records in the case under seal.

When a court files divorce records under seal, confidential or sensitive information within those records remains private and does not become a matter of public record.

**Dissolution** – the legal end of a marriage.

**Jurisdiction** – the authority of the court to rule on issues, relating to the parties, their children, or their property.

**Mediation** – is an alternative to litigation (the process of taking legal action) where a neutral third party facilitates the creation of a divorce agreement tailored to and agreed upon by the divorcing couple.



**Parenting Plan** - A document that establishes how parents will make decisions about their minor children. This must include a time-sharing schedule, and may also include other aspects of child-rearing such as education and the physical, social, and emotional well-being of the children. The document is developed by both parents or by the court in cases which the parents cannot agree or the plan they develop is not approved.



**Time-Sharing Schedule** - A schedule usually included in the parenting plan that specifies the time that a child will spend with each parent. The schedule must be agreed upon by both parents and include overnight stays and holidays. The court will determine the time-sharing schedule if both parents cannot agree.

## Understanding Florida Laws

### Who Can File for Divorce?

- To file for divorce in Florida, one of the spouses must have resided in Florida for at least six months before filing for divorce
- In Florida, either spouse can file for divorce

### How to File for Divorce

- Florida has a no-fault divorce system
- In Florida, divorce is called “dissolution of marriage”

Either the husband or the wife can file for divorce by filing a petition for dissolution of marriage with the circuit court in the county where the couple last lived together or the county where either husband or wife lives

- If spouses do not have dependent or minor children together, file: Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law [Form 12.901\(b\)\(3\)](#), Petition for Dissolution of Marriage with no Dependent or Minor Child(ren) or Property
- If spouses do not have dependent or minor children together but they do have marital assets or liabilities, file: Florida Supreme Court Approved

Family Law [Form 12.901\(b\)\(2\)](#), Petition for Dissolution of Marriage with Property but no Dependent or Minor Child(ren)

- If spouses have dependent or minor children together, file: Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law [Form 12.901\(b\)\(1\)](#), Petition for Dissolution of Marriage with Dependent or Minor Child(ren)

## What is Co-Parenting?

The benefit of having two parents in a child’s life is monumental. Every child deserves two healthy parents, and every family deserves to adjust to divorce and move forward. Divorce can be incredibly difficult for everyone involved, but if parents can learn new skills, it can help ease some of the stress and heightened emotions involved.

Here are the basic elements of co-parenting:

- Children have a good relationship with both parents.
- Both parents respond to the needs of their children.
- Parents rarely argue and never in front of the children.
- Parents do not place their children in the middle of conflicts.

Benefits of Co-Parenting	Difficulties in Co-Parenting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The child’s relationship with both parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication issues between co-parents</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of stability, normalcy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immature reactions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent rules and consequences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-parent knows how to get a reaction from the other parent</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty compromising</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern for child is the focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions can overwhelm the situation</li> </ul>



If the visit monitor comes into contact with a family that is not practicing co-parenting skills, or have not heard about co-parenting, the visit monitor can give each parent more information about what co-parenting is and how it can help their child.

### **A Note about Violence**

Monitors should be aware of the limitations of co-parenting in families with a history of domestic violence. Co-parenting, or shared parenting, is not a safe or appropriate situation for families with a history of serious domestic violence. Florida law allows judges to consider any history of domestic violence in determining the appropriate parenting plan. If there is a conviction of domestic violence (misdemeanor of 1st degree or higher), there is a rebuttable presumption against shared parenting.

**See Chapter XX on Domestic Violence to get more information about domestic violence and its impact on families in supervised visitation.**

## Positive Impact of Healthy Co-parenting on Children

- Feeling of stability, which allows for an easier adjustment to divorce and results in higher self-esteem.
- Continued relationships with both parents, freeing children from choosing a side on issues of conflict.
- Limit feelings of responsibility for the emotional and social needs of parents.
- Higher level of health, due to strong parental support.
- Higher grades, better social skills, and higher rates of high school graduation.
- Social competence and healthy communication skills due to parents who are sensitive to their needs and emotions.
- Lower likelihood to smoke, drink, and use drugs in adolescence due to higher level of parental involvement.

## Types of Support Children Need from Both Parents

- **Cognitive** - Providing healthy interaction, including play and caregiving activities, helps children develop problem solving skills.
- **Social** - Social support can help children learn to interact with others in a healthy way.
- **Emotional** - Emotional support can help children develop the healthy attachments, self-esteem, and independence needed to explore the world.
- **Physical** - Providing more attention and care to children can impact their physical development by increasing their well-being and health.

## Why do we need Co-Parenting?

- Research indicates that successful co-parenting relationships are beneficial for children's socio-emotional development.
- Well-coordinated co-parenting during the child's first year of life has been found to predict better child adjustment in later years, while distressed co-parenting predicts later child problems.
- Cooperative co-parenting relationships may be key to fostering positive nonresidential father involvement and lower levels of inter-parental conflict.

It is important for divorced parents to separate their emotions from their interactions with their children. Emotions are legitimate reactions to surrounding circumstances, but when it comes to children, a parent's emotions can get in the



way of positive interactions. For example, stress, depression, anger, and shame can all affect the way parents relate to each other and their children. It is important for parents to learn how to regulate their emotions and be able to handle stress in a healthy way. If parents feel that their emotions are making it difficult to build a strong, positive relationship with their child, it is essential that the parents reach out to a friend, religious leader, or counselor. It is important for parents to learn stress-relief techniques and coping methods so that the main focus becomes the well-being of the children.

## Co-Parenting Legal Issues

### Creating a Parenting Plan

The “Parenting Plan” is a document describing the parents’ agreement relating to decisions about the relationship between the parent and child and decisions about raising the child.

- The Parenting Plan must be approved by the court
- In Florida, joint or shared custody of the child is referred to as “time-sharing”

### What must be in the Parenting Plan? (s. 61.13(1)(b), F.S.)

- Describe how the parents will share and be responsible for the daily tasks associated with raising the child
- A time-sharing schedule, which contains the specific times the child will spend with each parent

- Choosing who will be responsible for any forms of:
  - Health care,
  - School-related matters,
    - including the address that will be used for determining school location and registration
  - Other activities
- The methods by which the parent will communicate with the child
  - Example- by phone, email, text, etc.

*The Parenting Plan must satisfy the “best interest of the child”*

- The court will approve the Parenting Plan if it is in the “best interest of the child.”
- Court can look to a variety of factors to determine whether the parenting plan is in the best interest of the child; factors are listed fully in [s. 61.13\(3\), F.S.](#); examples:
  - Parent’s demonstrated capacity to encourage a close and continuing parent-child relationship and comply with time-sharing schedule
  - Moral fitness of parent
  - Physical and mental health of parent
  - Reasonable preferences of child

## **DISPUTES ABOUT THE PARENTING PLAN**

Parenting Coordination ([s. 61.125, F.S.](#)) “Parenting coordination” is a child-focused alternative dispute resolution

- The court may appoint a “parenting coordinator,” who is a qualified neutral third person, to help the parents create or implement a Parenting Plan by helping resolve disputes between the parents

- The court cannot refer parties to parenting coordination if there is a history of domestic violence unless both parents agree



- Further information on parenting coordination can be found elsewhere in this manual

- If the parents cannot agree on a Parenting Plan that the court will approve, then the court will create the Parenting Plan.

## **PARENTING PLAN MODIFICATIONS**

- A person asking the court to modify a parenting plan may do so by filing a signed and notarized [Florida Form 12.905a](#) Supplemental Petition to Modify Parenting Plan/Time-Sharing Schedule and properly serving it upon the other parent. If the other party is in the military service, additional steps for service may be required. See, for example, Memorandum for Certificate of Military Service, Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law [Form 12.912\(a\)](#). If personal service is used, the other party has 20 days to answer after being served with your form 12.905a supplemental petition.

### **REMINDER:**

Supervised visitation monitors must not provide legal advice to parents or families.

This information is included so that visitation monitors will be better educated on the issues children and families may be facing in the midst of divorce.

# **CHILD SUPPORT**

Both parents are legally obligated to provide child support for their minor children

## **Determining the Amount of Child Support Owed**

- Child support guidelines are set forth in [section 61.30, F.S.](#)
- The minimum amount of child support needed is determined by using the “child support guidelines,” which is based on the parents’ combined net income estimated to have been spent on the child as if the parents were living together
  - Each parent’s percentage share of child support is determined by dividing each parent’s net monthly income by the combined net monthly income
- Florida Family Law Rules of Procedure [Form 12.902\(e\)](#) provides the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet that should be filed with the court
  - This form allows you to determine the amount of child support owed based on a specific formula
  - The form provides a chart containing the guideline amounts that should be used when calculating child support. The amount is based on the combined net income of the parents and the number of children they have, divided between the parents in direct proportion to their income or earning potential.
- If the parent requests more or less minimum child support than the amount provided by the guidelines, the parent must file a Motion to Deviate from Child Support Guidelines
  - This motion is filed by completing and filing Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law [Form 12.943](#) along with the Child Support Guidelines Worksheet (Form 12.902(e))
- The court may adjust the minimum child support, or the percentage of the parents’ share of the total minimum child support, based on the following deviation factors:

- Extraordinary medical, psychological, educational, or dental expenses
- Independent income of the child (excluding any moneys received by child from supplemental security income)
- The payment of support for a parent which has been regularly paid and for which there is a demonstrated need
- Seasonal variation in one parent or both parents' income or expenses
- The age of the child, taking into account the greater needs of older children
- Special needs, such as costs that may be associated with the disability of a child, that have traditionally been met within the family budget even though fulfilling those needs will cause the support to exceed the presumptive amount established by guidelines
- The total available assets of the parents and the child
- The impact of the Internal Revenue Service Child & Dependent Care Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, and dependency exemption and waiver of that exemption. The court may order a parent to execute a waiver of the Internal Revenue Service dependency exemption if the paying parent is current in support payments.
- An application of the child support guidelines schedule that requires a person to pay more than 55% of his or her gross income for a child support obligation for current support resulting from a single support order
- The particular parenting plan, a court-ordered time-sharing schedule, or a time-sharing arrangement exercised by agreement of the parties, such as where the child spends a significant amount of time, but less than 20% of the overnights, with one parent, thereby reducing the financial expenditures incurred by the other parent; or the refusal of a parent to become involved in the activities of the child
- Any other adjustments that are needed to achieve an equitable result which may include, but not be limited to, a reasonable and necessary existing expense or debt. Such expense or debt may include, but is not limited to, a reasonable and necessary expense or debt that the parents jointly incurred during the marriage

## Modification of an Existing Child Support Order

- Parents can seek to modify an existing child support order by proving a **substantial change in circumstances**
- The modification of child support must result in a change of at least 15% or \$50 (whichever is greater) from the existing monthly child support obligation
- Parent seeking to modify an existing child support order should file with the court a Supplemental Petition to Modify Child Support
  - Florida Supreme Court Family Law [Form 12.905\(b\)](#), Supplemental Petition for Modification of Child Support
    - Parent must serve other parent with notice of petition

## Child Support Solutions

Visitation monitors can help low-income families increase economic opportunities and improve child support outcomes through referrals and education. Many single-parent families, unmarried or divorced, are predominantly low-income and have difficulty with the child support system. The Florida Department of Revenue (DOR) has administered the Child Support Enforcement Program to provide child support services in most Florida counties. The purpose of the Child Support Enforcement Program is to:

- Make it easy for parents to provide support for their children,
- Serve customers with respect, concern, and professionalism,
- Ensure families can depend on their child support payments, and
- Work with parents, partners, and the community to continually improve the child support program.

Supervised visitation program staff should understand the services and functions of the local Child Support Enforcement (CSE) office. The CSE offices can help parents establish paternity, establish child support payments, enforce support orders, locate parents, and modify orders. Such services increase family economic stability and alleviate poverty. It is valuable for visitation programs to be able to provide meaningful linkages to families for assistance with financial improvement and sustainability strategies.



The Florida Office of Child Support Enforcement can be reached using the contact information below.

Florida Department of Revenue  
Child Support Services  
Phone: 800-622-5437  
<http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/childsupport>

## Facilitation Strategies

There are many ways for visit monitors to support children in divorce or separation cases. These can be achieved by the using various facilitation strategies when monitoring visits. Below are suggestions to assist in facilitating visits:

1. Review the case file to attempt to determine the depth of the relationship between the child and the visiting parent. For example, if there has been long term parental absence, staff should be on notice that a great deal of modeling and assistance may be necessary for at least the first few visits while the parent and child develop a stronger bond.
2. Remember that the child may be very aware of each parent's hostile feelings toward the other and may feel that each parent must be defended.
3. Staff should be prepared to model respectful behavior toward the parent. At a minimum, staff should insist on calling the parents Mr. or Mrs. or Ms. in the presence of the child to show respect.
4. Ask the custodial parent if a young child has a special comforting toy and blanket (or pacifier) that might make him or her feel more secure during the visit. Be sure that the child does not leave the toy at the end of the program when he or she leaves.

Staff should check the court records to determine what judicial decisions were made regarding parental responsibility in each case. Additionally, a thorough and on-going assessment should be conducted to determine what other information is necessary to keep the children safe.



5. Inform both parents at intake that visits are not to be used to speak critically of the other parent. The most important strategies are those used at intake to prevent damaging behavior at visits. If a parent needs to be reminded of the requirement for respect and appropriate references to the other parent, staff should consider more than redirection: an additional intake “refresher course” may be necessary.
6. Remember that the child has been in a great of transition during the separation or divorce. Younger children may feel more comfortable having the same visit room and the same toys for the first few visits. If the program rotates visit rooms, be sure to allow the child to see all the “special” elements of the new room.
7. If possible, have some idea of a parent’s literacy level before suggesting books the parent and child can read together.
8. Offer at least two activities at the beginning of the visit so that the parent and child can choose an activity together. This helps make the parent and child a “team.”

9. If a parent is angry or frustrated with the child's misbehavior, suggest ways to calm down as alternatives to hitting or yelling. For example, suggest that the parent may want to count to ten, or assist the parent in redirecting the child's attention.
10. When parents have multiple, active children visiting at one time, the program may need to have more than one monitor to assist with the children (especially for toileting). However, the parent should be encouraged to plan the visit ahead of time to include as many of the children as possible in activities.
11. If new spouses or partners are part of the visit, the program should conduct an intake with these persons also, to determine whether a relationship already exists with the child and how the child might be affected by having the additional person at the visit.
12. If a visit ends before the activity is finished (e.g. if a game is not finished), make note about this on file and ask the child and parent at the beginning of the next visit if they want to continue that same activity or move on to another one.



## Relevant Materials and Activities for Children

The following books and videos are materials that are helpful for assisting children who are struggling with parental divorce. It can be helpful for supervised visitation centers to have some of these materials on site and to provide this information to parents who are searching for tools to help in their child's coping process.

### Books for Children of Divorce

#### 0 – 18 months

Tots are Nondivorceable by *Sara Bonkowski*

#### 18 months – 3 years

1. Teach Me About Separation *By Joy Berry*
2. We're Having A Tuesday *By DK Simoneau*
3. Two Homes *By Claire Masurel*
4. It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear: A Read-Together Book for Parents and Young Children During Divorce *By Vicki Lansky*
5. Good-Bye, Daddy! *By Brigitte Weninger*

#### 4 – 7 years

1. My Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore: A Drawing Book For Children of Separated or Divorced Parents *By Judith Aron Rubin*
2. How I Feel: A Coloring Book for Kids During and After Divorce *By Alan D. Wolfelt*
3. I Don't Want to Talk About It *By Jeanie Franz Ransom*
4. Was It the Chocolate Pudding?: A Story For Little Kids About Divorce *By Sandra Levins*
5. When Mom and Dad Separate: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief from Divorce *By Marge Heegaard*

#### 8 – 12 years

1. Divorce Is Not the End of the World: Zoe's and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids *By Zoe and Evan Stern*
2. A Smart Girl's Guide to Her Parents' Divorce: How to Land on Your Feet When Your World Turns Upside Down *By Nancy Holyoke*
3. Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids: Feeling at Home in One Home or Two *By Isolina Ricci*
4. What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids *By Kent Winchester*
5. My Parents Are Divorced Too: A Book for Kids by Kids *By Melanie, Steven, and Annie Ford*

#### 13 – 17 years

1. The Divorce Helpbook for Teens *By Cynthia MacGregor*
2. Surviving Divorce: Teens Talk about What Hurts and What Helps *By Trudi Strain Trueit*
3. Divorce Can Happen To The Nicest People *By Peter Mayle*
4. The Kid's Guide To Divorce *By J.P. Brogan and V. Maiden*
5. Coping When Your Family Falls Apart *By Diana Booher*

## Videos for Children of Divorce

### 0-5 years

1. **Little Children, Big Challenges: Divorce**

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/divorce>

### 6-12 years

1. **Don't Divorce Me! Kids Rules For Parent on Divorce**

<http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/dont-divorce-me-kids-rules-for-parents-on-divorce/video/dont-divorce-me-trailer.html#/documentaries/dont-divorce-me-kids-rules-for-parents-on-divorce/index.html>

2. **SPLIT: A Film for Kids of Divorce (and their Parents)**

3. **Kids On Top of Divorce**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKPFGLuvHA>

4. **Divorce: A Journey Through the Kid's Eyes** (6-16 years)

### 13-17 years

1. **Divorce: A Journey Through the Kid's Eyes** (6-16 years)

2. **TeenBetween: Caught up in You Parent's Divorce**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9Pv2inG05U>

3. **How to deal with your parents' divorce & my experience**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foklIXeoqgM>

4. **Parents Divorcing**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG8zPgeG6fg>

5. **Dealing With Divorce**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Neb0ZGqUOlS>

### STOP and Think

- How can reading specific books on divorce and separation help children cope with what they are feeling?
- What are ways that parents can get involved when the child engages with books or videos about divorce and separation?

## PRACTICE EXAMPLES

### Case Scenario 1

Emilia had a long day at her new job and was feeling frustrated and irritable by the time she arrived at home. Earlier in the day, she had asked Johnathan, her 14 year old son, to clean his room and have it done before he watched TV. When she returned home, Johnathan was watching TV on the couch and his room was still dirty. Emilia stormed into the living room, grabbing the remote from her son and shut the TV off. She pulled him off of the couch by the arm yelling at him, “I said no TV until your room was clean! You are so incompetent, just like your father!”

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. What steps might the program director or visit monitor take *before visits begin* to lessen hostility during visits?
2. How should staff re-direct Mr. Phillips or his children?
3. Should staff say anything to Mrs. Phillips regarding the children’s remarks?
4. What, if anything should staff write in the visit report about this exchange?

#### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. Did Emilia overact?
2. How might Johnathan be feeling?
3. What could Emilia have done differently?
4. What can Emilia do to repair the parent-child relationship with Johnathan?

### Case Scenario 2

Karen and Adam Phillips were married for eight years and have two children, Sarah, age 5 and James, 7. Over two years Karen and Adam have scheduled nine court hearings for temporary relief, emergency relief, and clarifications of court orders, modifications, and contempt of court. The court ordered supervised visitation “to ensure that Mr. Phillips could maintain contact with his children until a court-ordered therapist recommended non-supervised visits.” During the first visit Sarah told the monitor “Mom says we don’t have to visit Dad if we don’t want to.” James asked his Dad why he “keeps bothers us and making us come here” Mr. Phillips answered, “Don’t listen to that b\*&%#.”

## Quiz Yourself!

1. Divorce can effect parents in which of the following ways?
  - A. Physical Health
  - B. Mental Health
  - C. Economic Stability
  - D. All of the above
  
2. Emotional long-term effects of divorce on children can include:
  - A. Increased anxiety and depression
  - B. Early engagement in sexual relationships
  - C. Long-term feelings of anger, hostility, and loneliness
  - D. Less satisfaction with their lives overall
  
3. The following are effects of divorce on toddlers *except*:
  - A. Clinginess with caregivers
  - B. Aggressive behavior
  - C. Problems making new friends
  - D. Problems with sleeping
  
4. What are some emotions that children can feel when experiencing divorce as loss?
  - A. Anger
  - B. Depression
  - C. Denial
  - D. Apathy

## MATCH THE TERMS & CONCEPTS

*This activity allows you to test your knowledge of relevant terms to this chapter. Draw a line to match the words to their correct definitions.*

**Co-  
parenting**

The process of taking a case through court and getting a final decision by a judge or jury.

**Parenting  
Plan**

A process in which a mental health expert evaluates the family and makes a recommendation to the court for custody or parenting plan that is in the child's best interest.

**Adjudication**

The legal end of a marriage.

**Child  
Custody  
Evaluation**

Both parents are involved in the child's life and respond to the child's needs.

**Custodial  
Parent**

A document that establishes how parents will make decisions about their minor children.

**Dissolution**

A schedule usually included in the parenting plan that specifies the time that a child will spend with each parent.



## Online Resources

### **Step-Parenting and Blended Families**

*<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/family-divorce/step-parenting-blended-families.htm>.*

This article provides parents with information on how to bond with stepchildren and deal with typical issues that can come up with step and blended families.

### **The Importance of Self Care for Health and Stress Management**

*<http://stress.about.com/od/lowstresslifestyle/a/selfcare.htm>.*

It is important for single parents to practice self-care after a divorce, in order to maintain physical and emotional health.

### **Coping with a Breakup or Divorce**

*<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/family-divorce/coping-with-a-breakup-or-divorce.htm>.* The article provides useful tips and information for individuals who are having a hard time dealing with the difficulties that are associated with their divorce.

### **11 Rules for Helping Your Child Deal With Divorce.**

*<http://www.parents.com/parenting/divorce/coping/helping-child-deal-with-divorce/?page=2>.* This resource can help parents who are currently going through a divorce in which there has not been violence or abuse understand how to respect boundaries and help children get through the experience as positively as possible.

### **Long-term Effects of Divorce on Children**

*<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/pdfs/fcs482.pdf>.* This handout goes through common long term effects that children may face when their parents experience divorce and offers suggestions for parents.

## Handouts

The following exercises can be given to parents in order to help them maintain positive self-esteem and perspective. If a visitation monitor notices that a parent is being self-critical during a visitation, especially if it is affecting the child, he or she can give the parent the “Positive Parent” handout.

### Positive Parenting

Think about what you were like before you had children. How have you changed by being a parent? Below are some different ways you may have changed as you raise your children. Read each statement and underline any you feel are true. Then write down the top three ways you feel you have grown.

#### Personal Development

- I have found that I am stronger than I thought I was.
- I am better able to solve problems.
- I have more confidence.
- I am more reliable and dependable.
- I have greater courage when facing new situations.

#### Relationships

- I can count on others in times of trouble.
- I am more caring.
- I value my friends and family more.
- I show support to others.
- I put more effort into relationships.

#### New Meanings

- I have a better understanding of what I believe.
- What I think is important has changed.
- I can take on difficulties.
- I have a stronger religious faith.
- I believe my life is important.

#### New Possibilities

- I am more likely to change things that need to be changed.
- I have found new interests and hobbies.
- I am able to do better things with my life.

The #1 way I have grown: \_\_\_\_\_

The #2 way I have grown: \_\_\_\_\_

The #3 way I have grown: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervised visitation monitors can give this exercise to parents who are having difficulty coping with their divorce and are adversely affecting their child through their negative self-outlook. The “I am Strong” handout can help parents recognize their strengths and help them relate those strengths to their parenting.

## I am Strong

Having children often makes parents want to be a better role model. Raising children makes parents stronger. Parents should use the list below to identify their strengths by circling those that most apply to them below. Then parents should list the top three strengths they feel most confident in the lines provided below.

Creative	Fair	Confident	Eager to Learn	Positive
Passionate	Focused	Forgiving	Don't give up	Healthy
Trustworthy	Calm	Loyal	Very Patient	Loving
Hard-working	Humble	Spiritual	Imaginative	Kind
Lots of Friends	Happy	Supportive	Goal-oriented	Striving
Want to do better	Funny	Sensitive	Understanding	Hopeful
Dependable	Caring	Leader	Self-controlled	Curious

Strength #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Strength #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Strength #3: \_\_\_\_\_

On a separate sheet of paper, parents should answer the following questions below based on the about the strengths they identified:

- 1.) Is there a strength you feel you have developed that surprised you? Why do you think you were not able to recognize it before?
- 2.) How would you describe yourself if someone asked you about your life? What strengths would come to mind in your description? Do you feel a particular strength is central to your personal identity?
- 3.) Think of a situation you did not handle well, and identify what strengths could have been useful during that time. How might this have changed the outcome of the situation?
- 4.) Was there strength you do not feel you currently have, but would like to develop in your life? What are some ways you could start to practice this strength?

## Coping Methods for Parents

After a divorce, parents may notice feeling more stressed with their responsibilities. The following list provides different strategies that can help parents effectively handle that stress.

Coping Method	How it Helps	Examples
<b>Relaxation</b>	Relaxation can help slow your breathing rate, relax your muscles, and reduce blood pressure, limiting the harmful effects of stress.	This can involve simply breathing slowly, meditation, yoga, or resting in a quiet space.
<b>Physical Recreation</b>	Exercise has been proven to be a helpful de-stressor for many people and can help you sort out your emotions. The endorphins you feel will also help to give you a more positive outlook on life.	Go for a run, join a sports team, stretch, or find a yoga class to plug into.
<b>Writing</b>	Journaling your feelings and thoughts can be a healthy release from the situation at hand. It can give you a new perspective on the situation that you may not have had before.	Start a new journal, create a blog, or write notes to a loved one about your struggles.
<b>Healthy Distractions</b>	Engaging in a healthy distraction can help provide a break to reevaluate the conflict, but remember to evaluate what triggered your emotional response later on.	Read a book, take a bath, or watch a movie to relax and give your mind a breather.
<b>Reach Out</b>	Seeking support can help you identify and manage your emotions, while feeling a boost in self-assurance.	This can mean simply talking to a friend, taking the step to join a support group, or reaching out for professional help.

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