



# Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation

The Institute for Family Violence Studies

Florida State University

## MARCH EPRESS

### QUESTIONS FROM DIRECTORS

*We've seen this before, but it's getting worse. Mom drops off the children for a visit with Dad, and it's clear that Mom favors the son, and Dad favors the daughter. At first we let it go, but now we're wondering if it's an unhealthy dynamic, because now we notice that the kids resent each other. There are no therapists involved, and we don't do therapeutic visits. What can we do?*

This question has come up multiple times in the recent past. We've included some important information later in the epress about it. There are three things you can do immediately. First, take time to inform both parents about what's going on – from your perspective. Take time to educate them both (separately) in case they don't realize what they're doing. And note the short and long term effect on the kids. Appeal to their sense of fairness and parental affection. Then, document everything. Don't worry that the parents are unhappy with your assessment. You owe it to these children to call out their parents' behavior. Remember too that kids can pick up on their parents' cues. When you notice the children picking on each other, point out to them that they are family, and their family is going through a difficult time and the kids need to stick together. When the maternal grandmother comes to the visit, see if you can get her to notice what's going on, so she can help break the patterns at home. This is not a one-and-done effort – you may have to repeatedly remind the family members about the detrimental effects of their behavior. Be sure to document when you do.

**Specific tips:**

Help each parent name something that each child does well.

Help each child name a strength of the sibling.

**Ask each parent whether they experienced favoritism when they were young.**

**Explore ways with parents to break the cycle of favoritism. Emphasize that every person has strengths.**

***Does the Clearinghouse keep the employee records proving that they have received the mandatory training?***

**No. We suggest that you keep records of training in the employee's files. There are checklists that the Clearinghouse created, but we don't keep them on file.**

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## **Missing the Signs of Child Abuse**

By Brittney Clemons

Child abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver's non-accidental act or failure to act, causes or creates a substantial risk of, death or physical or emotional harm to a child under the age of 18. Child abuse can occur both inside and outside of the home and can be committed by any person who has contact with the child. There are many forms of child maltreatment, including neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse.

While these forms may seem simple enough for parents to notice, the truth is that child abuse is not always easy to identify and even some of the best parents can fail to notice that their child has been or is being abused. This is in part due to the characteristics of the child, offender, and parent. Recognizing child abuse can be as simple as asking the right questions, paying attention to adult-child interaction style, and recognizing differences in a child's behavior.



### **Reasons Parents Miss the Signs of Child Abuse**

Reasons child abuse can go unnoticed:

- Children are more likely to be sexually abused by someone they know, trust, or love, including someone in the family “context” who is trusted by the child’s parents.
- Sexual abuse often begins through testing boundaries gradually thereby increasing the chance that their behavior will seem okay and decreasing the chance that anyone will speak up.
- People who sexually abuse children often relate well to kids.
- People who sexually abuse children don’t want children to tell and some may threaten to hurt the child or their family.
- It can be easy to talk ourselves out of concerns.
- Children may not talk about the problem, because they fear or want to protect the offender or they don’t believe they will be taken seriously.
- Parents don’t ask their children the right questions in private.

## Prevention Parenting

Vigilant parenting is important in preventing abuse. Parents should talk to children, identify potential abusers, and recognize red flags that should lead to further investigation. Sometimes parents miss the signs of abuse because they fail to ask their children the right questions in private. After a child has been absent from the presence of his or her parents there are five questions every parent should ask their child upon their return:



1. How did you spend your time?
2. What was your favorite part?
3. What was the least favorite part?
4. Did you feel safe?
5. Is there anything else that you want to share?

*What You Can Do If You See Warning Signs*

If you see signs of child abuse, take action. When speaking up about your suspicions of child abuse you run the risk of your suspicions being right or wrong. The risk of being right about the existence of child abuse is greater than the risk of being wrong. If your suspicions of child abuse are right and you do something about it you can possibly save a child from great harm.

If you see warning signs,

- Don't wait for "proof" of child abuse,
- Keep track of behaviors that concern you,
- Speak up whenever you have a concern.



## **Knowing how to call the Hotline**

**1-800-96ABUSE**

**Supervised Visitation program staff/volunteers/interns are all mandated reporters!**

**Be prepared to give your name, address, and information.**

**If you are at a supervised visitation program, be sure to follow the program's chain of command.**

**Document every call you make.**

**If a parent alleges abuse, ask that parent if he or she has made the hotline call.**

## **References**

1. <http://www.stopitnow.org/ohc-content/tip-sheet-7>
2. <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect.htm>
3. <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dcf/child-abuse-neglect/warning-signs.html>
4. <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/tc/child-maltreatment-symptoms>
5. [http://www.stopitnow.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/lets\\_talk.pdf](http://www.stopitnow.org/sites/default/files/documents/files/lets_talk.pdf)

## Families Can Prevent Child Abuse!

*These guidelines can help you create an environment to better protect your children from abuse.*

### **1. Educate everyone in the family**

- Make sure each family member knows what healthy adult-child interaction is, and what behaviors might be of concern.
- Learn to recognize warning signs that a child may have been abused (physically, sexually, and emotionally).
- Teach children what to do if someone tries to harm them.
- Make sure young children know that no one has the right to touch their private parts (unless for medical reasons) and that they should not touch anyone else's private parts.

### **2. Start talking with your family about sexual abuse**

- Talk with your children about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviors.

### **3. Set clear family boundaries**

- Set clear family guidelines for what you expect from your children and those who supervise your children.
- Discuss these guidelines with the children and adults who spend time around or supervise the children.
- Let children know that if they are not comfortable being around a particular adult or older child then they should let you know.

### **4. Get trustworthy adults involved**

- Identify one or more persons for each member of the family to talk to if there is a concern.

### **Responding to Abuse**

1. Report abuse to the authorities
2. Take your child to a professional therapist or counselor
3. Be supportive



# Negative Effects of Differential Parenting and Sibling Competition

BY SAMANTHA MATRAS

## Introduction

Parents may not readily admit they play favorites with their children, but it is nonetheless a prevalent problem in families and can lead to serious, negative effects if not recognized and addressed. Differential parenting, or parental favoritism, can take many forms and is more often recognized by children before the parents. Common sense would predict that the less-favored child in a family would suffer from associated negative effects of favoritism, but providing positive feedback to one sibling and negative feedback to another can have a wide-range of ramifications on not just the disfavored child, but the entire family system.

Moreover, the consequences of differential favoritism are ten-fold: favoritism can promote sibling competition, which is a risk factor for sibling abuse. Sibling abuse, while not as well known as other types of violence, is actually the most common form of family violence.



## What is Favoritism?

Often favoritism appears as a form of “unfairness”. Children look for signs of unfairness and report those signs to the parent hoping the parent will remedy the unfair treatment. For example, a younger child may feel it is unfair that she has an earlier bedtime than an older child, yet the parent is treating the two children differently in order to accommodate individual differences or needs. The differential parental treatment is based on their different ages. If the parent succumbs to the youngest child’s wishes by giving her the same bedtime as the eldest child, the older child may then retaliate.

Favoritism extends beyond unavoidable unfairness that is apparent to children. Favoritism can include concise comparison and preferential treatment. Parents are the ones who have the power in the family system and are the ones who can ultimately decide how individual differences among children are valued and consequently treated.

Favoritism can be prejudicial, placing superior/inferior labels on children via comparison. For example, a parent may say, “you’re not as bright as your sister.” Serious negative effects can arise if the less-favored child believes her inferior label to be true.

**Favoritism includes the inequitable expressions of:**

Approval  
Pride  
Boasting  
Attention  
Compliments  
Comparisons

**Favoritism includes inequitable provisions of:**

Privileges  
Resources  
Freedoms  
Exceptions  
Opportunities  
Awards

## Effects

Parental favoritism is manifested in many ways and the effects vary between favored and disfavored children. Some evidence supports classic psychologist such as Freud and Adler suggesting that while disfavored children suffer from negative effects of parental favoritism, the favored child can actually reap some positive and negative effects. While favored children may reap some positive effects of parental favoritism, mainly long-term, negative effects are associated with children given negative, differential parental treatment.

## Effects of Favoritism

- Weakened self-esteem
- Questions self-worth
  - When parents compare children they may label and type-cast the disfavored child. If that child believes parents’ labels for her, she may start to question her self-worth.
- Need to feel special
- Poor academic performance
- Problems with intimate relationships -The favored child may feel as if no one can love her as much as her parents do. This mentality can create challenges in future intimate relationships.
- Depression - Favored children may spend much of their time trying to win parents’ favoritism, which will leave less time and fewer chances for them to develop their personality and self-identity
- Guilt - If the favored child recognizes she is receiving unfair and preferential treatment, she may feel guilt and even demonstrate self-blame for the differential treatment

## Affects the Entire Family

Studies have shown that not only do children undergo negative consequences, but if children recognize unfair treatment, the children can exhibit behavioral problems as well. Studies suggest that negative effects largely took the form of externalized behavioral problems referring to emotional-behavioral problems such as anti-social and aggressive conduct.



### ***Ill feelings between siblings -***

Sometimes there may be a misallocation of resentment. The child receiving parental favoritism will receive blame and hostility for the parents' actions and the parents will receive less backlash from the disfavored child.

### ***Long-term effects on sibling***

***relationships*** - Studies show that parental favoritism not only has damaging effects on sibling

relationships in childhood, but may have long-term effects on adult sibling relationships as well. When a mother appears to be closer to one child during childhood, sibling closeness decreases and sibling conflict increases and those relationships hold up through adulthood.

## Preventative Steps

Visitation monitors should identify differential parenting and assist parents in taking steps to prevent favoritism and change behaviors that may contribute to these issues.

- 1) Do not compare one child to another or make statements that elicit comparison to yourself, other people, or the children themselves.
- 2) If one child seems to consistently show jealousy of another child, check your behavior to ensure the jealousy is not due to preferential treatment. If so, try to consciously avoid such behavior.
- 3) Parents can further avoid intentional, parental favoritism by favoring *all* children. Ensure this message resonates with children by declaring each one is valued and loved for their individual uniqueness. Because of their uniqueness, it is impossible for one child to replace or compete with others for love.



## **Sibling Violence**

Although it is not on the social radar, sibling violence is the most common form of family violence. Family environments, where parental favoritism is present, are similar to family environments where sibling violence is present.

**Sibling violence definition:** According to the University of Michigan's Health System, sibling violence is the physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of one sibling by another sibling. In addition, financial abuse and the use of substances to control siblings are common forms of abuse.

When sibling violence is present, the perpetrator of the abuse is often the receiver of preferential, parental treatment. Studies show that favoritism can reinforce and even promote a favored child's abusive behavior towards his or her sibling(s). Additionally, victim's may feel parental favoritism adds to their sibling's competitive and aggressive dispositions. Parental favoritism may appear in family environments where there is limited physical or emotional availability from the parents. In these environments, some children may seek comfort and support from their siblings, but in most cases, the consequences of parental favoritism and the limited emotional "availability" of one parent will subsequently leave all children in need for attention and love. This common neediness instead breeds competition and contempt between siblings.

### **Signs of sibling violence:**

- Children's roles are ridged: one child is consistently the aggressor and the other is the victim
- Roughness and violence between siblings increases overtime
- One child avoids his or her sibling
- Changes in behavior, sleep patterns, eating habits, or nightmares
- Children act out inappropriately
- Acting out the violence during playtime

## **Conclusion**

Differential parenting is manifested in many ways. While some forms of parental favoritism are more damaging than others, overall, playing favorites has negative consequences that affect the entire family system. Monitors should help parents to recognize when they are playing favorites and adjust parenting-styles to exclude intentional favoritism. Recognizing and mitigating parental favoritism can prevent associated effects such as anti-social behavior and sibling-competition, a risk factor for sibling violence.

## References

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- Waxman, O. B., (2013, February 6). How parents who play favorites hurt the entire family. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://healthland.time.com/2013/02/12/how-parents-who-play-favorites-hurt-the-entire-family/>

# Family Time

By Brittney Clemons

## Introduction

Family cohesion, even with one-parent families, cannot develop without effort from parents and children. Families have to be intentional about spending time with one another. This includes deciding to be present in the moment and striving to have positive interactions with your family. Quality time fosters bonding and creates a safe environment where children can grow and feel accepted and valued for their own uniqueness. Parents and children both benefit from spending quality family time together; Children feel special when their parents take time out of their day to spend time with them and parents feel more appreciated when their children express enjoyment during family time. When parents are too busy to spend time with their children, it can make children feel unwanted and in return children may express their frustration through misconduct. Spending time with your children shows them that you are available, fosters a sense of security, and gives them the confidence that they need to thrive.



## The Benefits of Family Time

In most households, parents are employed and have busy schedules and children can become consumed with social media, friends, extracurricular activities, and school. Day-to-day living can create feelings of stress and anxiety. Spending time with family can provide children and parents with feelings of love, support, and safety. There are countless benefits of doing family activities together, including:

- Stronger family bonds
- Greater academic success
- Fewer behavioral problems
- Less likely to engage in violence
- Lower risk for substance abuse
- Reduced risky sexual behavior

- Greater intimacy among parents
- Siblings fight less
- Stronger emotional bond between parents and children
- Better communication between family members
- Family members become more dependable and come to trust each other more
- Children open up more with parents and share more about their experiences outside of the home.

## How to Spend Family Time

Spending quality family time together doesn't need to cost a lot of money. In fact, a family's core leisure activities such as playing board games, playing outside together, reading, and watching television together are related to family cohesion. Surprisingly, some of the most fun activities are at little-to-no cost. Simple things like having dinner together each night and having family meetings can create the meaningful family time that your children need.

*Ways to spend family time together include:*

- Family game night
- Family movie night
- Special family dinner night
- Walk on the beach
- Game of catch
- Cooking together
- Doing chores together
- Volunteering together as a family
- Sports event
- Holiday crafts and activities
- Eating at restaurants that serve exotic cuisines and sampling different dishes.

## What are the Guidelines for Family Time?

Working parents, children's extracurricular activities, commitments and obligations outside of the household can make for busy schedules. Busy schedules leave little room for family activities. It is important that families make family time a priority. This means setting aside time to spend with your family. Here are some general rules you can implement to help in successful family time.

- Every family member attends, including step parents and step children.

- Pre-planning - agree on an activity early in the week and take care of your obligations beforehand. This means all family members chores, homework, and other commitments should be taken care of so that they do not interfere with the time dedicated to your family.
- Unclutter - Make sure obligations are met and minds are clear so there will be limited distractions. Be fully present at all times.
- Capture Memories – Take pictures and record special moments in photographs or on video. At the end of family time reflect and talk about the best parts of the time together and what the family is excited for in the next family time session.
- End Well – Before ending, tell your family that you are grateful that you were able to spend the time with them.

## **Conclusion**

Family time can create lasting memories, strengthen family ties, and build confidence in children. Family time can be both beneficial to children and parents. Spending time together as a family helps busy parents reconnect with their children and helps children build a positive sense of self-worth. Some of the most memorable moments are created during day-to-day interactions and cost little-to-no money. With the guidelines above, you can implement family time to benefit everyone in the family. Prepare, be present, remain positive, and make the best of every moment spend with your family.

## **Resources**

1. <http://zenhabits.net/family-day-and-family-meetings/>
2. <http://familyfacts.org/briefs/15/a-wise-investment-benefits-from-families-spending-time-together>
3. <http://source.southuniversity.edu/the-advantages-of-family-time-113366.aspx>
4. <http://www.tracylamperti.com/pdfs/3Family%20Time.pdf>

# Six Tips for Keeping Teens Safe on Social Media



More than 60 percent of teens in the United States have at least one social media account, according to the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. And while being online is a good way to keep in touch with friends, it's important for parents to be proactive about Internet safety.

Unfortunately, there are people who can use your child's personal information to steal identities, bully them or begin an inappropriate relationship. Help protect students from online dangers by following these safety tips

1. Keep your child's profile private so that only family and people you know see photos, important dates and other information.
2. Make sure they're not posting personal details, including phone numbers, home address, and the name of their school or Social Security number.
3. Only allow them to publish [photos and videos](#) that don't jeopardize their safety or their integrity.
4. Make sure they choose a strong password that can't be guessed, and that it gets changed every three months.
5. Never allow them to accept friend requests from people they don't know.
6. Keep an open dialogue with your children. Ask them to let you know if they've received private messages from a stranger, or from someone at school who is teasing, harassing or threatening them. Those could be signs of [cyber-bullying](#) or even a [sexual predator](#).

Get additional online safety tips, and other relevant information on [OnGuardOnline.gov](https://www.onguardonline.gov), a great government resource for parents and teens.



# 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.

# 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</li></ul>

	bringing something comforting from the home the child finds comforting.
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



How Toddlers May Feel	How Parents Can Help the Child
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> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 style="text-align: center;"><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 style="text-align: center;"><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>

<p>Unable to define feelings</p>	<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>
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***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>
Insecure	<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>
They have to choose sides	<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>

		Shows aggressive behavior (hitting, biting, kicking, scratching, etc.)
<b>Young Children</b> Protective parent Freedom to explore Defined roles for parent Contact with other children for socialization and play To show autonomy and mastery	Blames self for parents' problems Feels guilty or ashamed Fears punishment or rejection Feels frightened or confused Has fantasies of parental reconciliation Feels jealous May regress to an earlier age	Difficulty expressing feelings Acts younger than true age Toileting accidents Fights with siblings
<b>Older Children</b> To be shielded from parental conflict and negativity To be talked with and listened to Contact with both parents To be involved at school Parents to be involved at school Support from friends Developed sense of competence	Feelings of sadness or anxiety Feelings of guilt or fear Feelings of shame or low self-esteem Has fantasies of parental reconciliation Experiences loyalty conflicts Believes parents are all good or all bad Feelings of anger	Unable to express feelings Gets frustrated Shows hostility towards others Acts younger than true age Acts older than true age
<b>Adolescents</b> Parents to be emotionally stable Low levels of parental conflict Parents to act mature Parental supervision Quality time with both parents	Feelings of sadness or depression Feelings of anger or disappointment Feelings of self-doubt Lacks self-esteem Shows parental behavior	Insincere disconnection or apathy Expresses sadness, anger, shame and/or disgust Questions family relationships

<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>Emotionally unbalanced</p> <p>Partakes in sexual behavior prematurely</p> <p>May feel relieved parents are divorced</p>	<p>Pulls away from family</p>
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