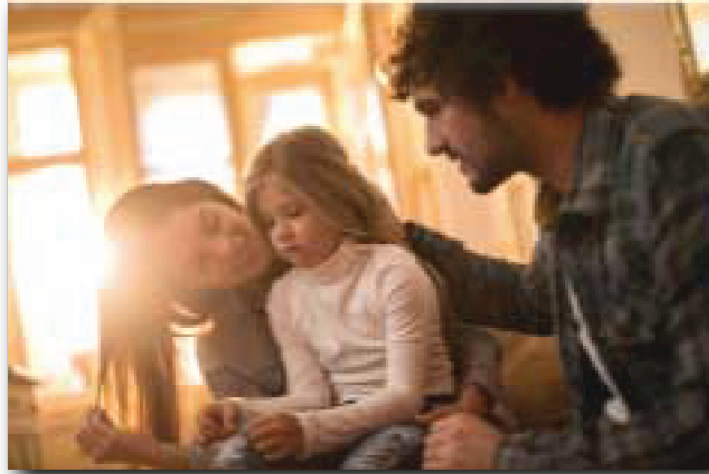




MAKING DIVORCE HEALTHIER FOR KIDS

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Happy and well-adjusted may not be the way most people think about children of divorce, but not only is it possible- it's becoming the experience for more and more children whose parents have decided to separate. Much of this positive change is the result of couples opting out of the adversarial *me vs. you* approach in favor of mediation, but that's not the only reason kids are experiencing less trauma.

The thin veneer that once made lawyering up so appealing has worn thin, and as much as this good for couples, children have become the real winners.

Over the last 10 years, a lot has changed about getting divorced. When I began my practice, most couples placed tremendous importance and energy on who kept what and how much.

And, while the financial outcome of a divorce is important, it should not overshadow the well-being of children. Now, however; the overwhelming priority of both spouses is their children.

Even when the majority of divorces were conducted through attorneys, parents always had the ability to put their children first, but that system directed them to place disproportionate importance on financial outcomes over child welfare and on-going parental relationships.

Mediation may play a role in making divorce easier for children, but it is parents who deserve the credit, because they are the ones changing the impact of divorce on their children - and they are raising healthy, well-adjusted children together.

FACTS DON'T LIE

Every year, over one million children are affected by their parents' divorce and of those, many will be subjected to on-going conflict and hostility during and after the divorce. The emotional wounds of a bitter divorce never go away and often remain with children into their adult lives. But, the impact doesn't end there. The conduct children witness from their parents during and after a divorce shapes their perspective about relationships, how to handle conflict in their own lives, and their emotional and sometimes physical health as adults. So much of the dysfunction children experience from their parents' divorce becomes the imprint for their adult lives and interpersonal skills.



FILTER AND QUALIFY ADVICE

There is no shortage of advice that is freely given once a divorce is announced. In fact, much of the advice divorcing husbands and wives typically receive is more divisive and provocative than peaceful and wise. This advice comes from friends, family and even co-workers who may have good intentions, but do not understand the consequences of parental conflict on children. Whether your divorce is facilitated by attorneys or a Mediator, everyone's priority should be ensuring the well-being of your children and keeping conflict to a minimum. Advice from anyone who encourages the opposite should be avoided.



TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

The healthiest thing parents can do for their children and make the transition of a divorce as easy as possible for them is to separate their personal relationship and differences from the roles and responsibilities they will continue to share. Parents who struggle with this separation can benefit from individual counseling as well as co-parenting counseling to help them establish a child-centered relationship which does not involve their personal feelings.



DO WHAT'S BEST FOR YOUR CHILD



Make a commitment from the moment you know you are getting divorced to keep your children out of your problems and instead, make their well-being your priority. Emotional safety and security, healthy relationships with both parents, and having two loving, nurturing homes are a child's right. No child should ever be forced to divide their loyalty between parents that they need and love equally.

With the way many Family Court systems still function, no importance is placed on children's emotions, the long-term effects of this system has on them, or the relationship divorced spouses will have as divorced co-parents. There is no better reason than this for parents to do what is best for their children.

Co-parenting is just like every other relationship; you get out of it what you put into it. It may not be easy at first. Setbacks aren't failures, and the more effort you put into it, the more you'll end up succeeding.

Dos & Don't s *for parents*

- Tell your child the divorce is not their fault often
 - Reassure your child they will have daily interaction with both of you
 - Let them know it's okay to be sad or angry
 - Don't make promises to your child you cannot or will not keep
 - Tell them you love them often
 - Don't make your child your therapist
 - Share only relevant, age appropriate information about the divorce
 - Never ask them to carry messages between you and their other parent
 - Let them know you are always available to listen
 - Never criticize their other parent, and insist friends and family do the same
 - Never put your child in a position to choose between you or take sides
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F.Y.I.

Vulnerability to both physical and mental illness can originate in the traumatic loss of one or both parents through divorce. With care and attention, however, a family's strengths can be mobilized during a divorce, and children can be helped to deal constructively with the resolution of parental conflict.

Source: American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry