**Effects of Divorce On Children and Parents**

Records show marriages have been taking place since the earliest recorded history. Evidence of elaborate ceremonies joining couples together are present all over the world. Couples have been joined in a legal contract, for a number of reasons: religious, arraigned marriages, kinship bonds, pool resources, children, and romantic love. When a marriage is successful, there are many benefits for the couple, a shared mutual trust and respect for one another. When the marriage is not working and there is a break down in communication, common goal or trust, many times this will result in a divorce. A divorce can be a painful process, even more so if children are involved.

Divorce is often believed to be final when the judge declares the two divorced. It is, in fact, a legal dissolvement of the marriage contract. Divorce occurs in stages and must be accepted emotionally and the couple must go through a grieving process, (grieving the relationship) even if the divorce is wanted by both parties.

Studies show mothers initiate most divorces, usually after a long time of agonising over the decision. The decision to divorce often leaves the mother feeling guilty for what she is going to put her children through. This guilt may stem from religious beliefs - not always of religious roots and society's attitude that divorce is a personal failure. The reasons for divorce are as numerous as the reasons for marriage.

For the divorcing parents, usually one year after is the "low point." Many parents will find divorce has changed more things in their lives than first anticipated. These changes and adjustments will take longer and be more upsetting than expected.

Most people experience three stages of adjustment after a divorce. In the initial stage of the marital disruption, all things are changing, people are unsure of the future. This can last a few months or up to a year or two. This stage of divorce is the most painful. The second stage is referred to as the transitional period which occurs after the break-up "settles down". Parents try out new lifestyle and reorganise their lives. Many changes for parents and children take place during this stage. During the third stage, parents and children feel a renewed sense of stability. Parents have formed new relationships and stable patterns of visitation and custody. The children feel more secure because they are living in a stable environment.

The national divorce rate is 4.6, according to a compilation of new data released by the Family Research Council. In 1994, 4.6 of every 1,000 Americans divorced. Currently, divorce laws in almost every state give greater legal rights to spouses who want to end the marriage than to spouses who want to try to work out their marital problems. According to FRC's 1995 Family Issues Survey, 55 percent of the American public want to see these laws modified to offer greater protection to spouses interested in saving the marriage.

The divorce rate has quadrupled from 4.3 million in 1970 to 18.3 million in 1996. 14% of white women who married in the 1940s eventually divorced. A single generation later, almost 50 percent of those that married in the late sixties and early seventies have already divorced. Between 1970 and 1992, the proportion of babies born outside of marriage leaped from 11% to 30%. And this situation is observed all over the world and considered to be of major importance, especially in Islamic countries.

A separation or divorce will inevitably have a profound effect upon children, and sometimes it can even be devastating to them. The good news is that divorce needn't leave long-lasting psychological scars, and a lot depends on how you handle things. Take heart in knowing that you can make an enormous difference in how the children fare.

Children commonly will react to parents separating or divorcing by developing signs of distress, or symptoms, and it is normal for them to do so. Here are some to look for, or to recognise when they occur.

Pre-schoolers may react by becoming increasingly clingy or fearful about separation times, when dropping them off at school or day-care, and also at bedtime. Changes in their normal eating or sleeping patterns are often a sign that a child is experiencing distress. They also sometimes have increased tantrums, or may cry more easily than usual. Regressive behaviour like thumb sucking or talking baby talk again is also common. Bed wetting is also a common sign of distress, and may be an expression of anxiety or anger. Children sometimes "somatize" or develop physical complaints, like headaches or stomach aches. Adults should be careful however, not to readily dismiss these symptoms as "purely emotional reactions", and if physical symptoms are persistent or severe, they should always be checked out by the child's paediatrician. Children in this age group experience feelings of anger, sadness and anxiety. Boys become noisier, angry and more restless. They tend to sit alone and won't play well with friends and often they disrupt group activities. Girls are angry too - but usually try to become "little adults". Girls are concerned with good behaviour and being neat. They may lecture others or scold them as if a parent or teacher. Both boys and girls cry more and become more demanding. At this age, they may regress and act younger than their age. They may resume behaviours previously outgrown, such as bedwetting, thumb sucking, needing a special blanket and may experience nightmares.

School-age children may exhibit some of the same signs as younger children, but may also display more overt signs of anger, worry or sadness. Others may act like "they don't care" and put on an air of cool indifference, while some kids will blatantly deny that their parents are divorcing. Sometimes kids in this age try to be "extra good", as if they could behave perfectly, then maybe their parents won't separate. This stems from the all too common belief that children often have that the divorce is somehow their fault. It's usually a good idea to let them know that divorce is "grown-up business", and is certainly not their doing. In contrast to the child who is working overtime to "be good", are some kids who start to become quite overtly oppositional, aggressive, or even hostile to a parent, perhaps blaming one of them for the divorce. Some children are more subtle in their resentment, and may display passive-aggressive behaviours, such as spilling things, losing things, and frequently forgetting to do things. Boys in this age group seem to take it the hardest. Most psychologists believe this is due to the fact that when fathers move out, the boy loses a constant male role model. Girls of this age still maintain their identity with the role model, their mother. Both boys and girls experience sadness and will cry openly at the marital break-up. They both feel rejected by the departing parent. Boys become weepy and miss their fathers quite intensely at this age. They may try to hide these feelings if the mother is openly hostile toward the father. It is quite common for both to have low self esteem and feel unlovable and rejected. These children have a great deal of problems in school with concentration.

Teenagers can be a handful under normal circumstances, i.e. they are typically argumentative and oppositional. When there is a divorce situation, some warning signs of distress are displayed by "acting out" behaviours, such as running away, truanting from school, school suspension, physical fighting, trouble with the law, drug and alcohol abuse, and promiscuity. Still others may become depressed and withdrawn, and may show a marked increase or decrease in their eating or sleeping patterns, and may even express suicidal thoughts. Research on suicide published in Social Science Quarterly showed that, of many variables, divorce had the strongest relationship to suicide rates and marriage had the weakest. Research done by the Centers for Disease Control and published in the American Journal of Public Health reveals that divorced individuals are three times more likely to commit suicide than those who are married. If they do express suicidal ideation, parents should take it seriously! It may very well only be a cry for help or attention, but they can't take a chance and assume it's nothing to be concerned about. If they talk about wishing they were dead, killing themselves, or dropping hints that they "won't be around much longer", their parents are ought to talk to them about this openly and get some professional help for them right away.

Studies show that ten years after their parents' divorce, 30% of the children cope successfully in life, while 40% have mixed successes with relationships, and personal problems. The remaining 30% continue to struggle with significant relationship and personal problems.

Some children remain angry at parents or reject the departing parent. Some remain sad over the divorce and long for the absent parent or hold unreal idealised memories of their lives before the divorce. Others feel "needy" with an increased concern for loyalty, security, and commitment in relationships. Dome children report feeling deprived of their childhood. Also reported is loneliness as adults and more marital conflicts than children whose parents remained married. One positive long term reaction that of feeling strong and more independent as a result of the divorce.

The way in which children handle divorce is strongly related to the manner in which parents handle the divorce. Parents who co-operate with each other during and after the divorce help their children in their own adjustments. One of the most harmful elements in a divorce is constant parental fighting. Other problems include one or both parents talking badly about the other or fighting over child support. Visitation or other issues leaves the children insecure and feeling in the middle. When parents use the children as messengers, instead of talking directly to each other, children feel pulled in two directions. Children don't want to give a message that is going to upset one parent, and they don't want to disobey the other parent by refusing to deliver the message. They also feel pulled in two directions when being interrogated by one parent after visiting the other parent.

Children suffer when they lose contact with the departing parent, which is usually the father. Fathers become less involved with their children due to fighting, limits on visitation, and generally not knowing what to do with the kids when they have them. Fathers generally have the children two weekends a month, during which they attempt to "entertain" them. Society has given men in the recent past a lesser role as parents, by treating their children as "guests" to be entertain each weekend, they begin to lose the fathering role even more. The fathers begin to feel the hassles involved with visitation are not worth their efforts.

During the first year following a divorce, mothers are less available to their children. The adults usually find themselves working more hours to support the family than before the divorce. Many mothers find that father after divorce, they are living below the poverty level. Children suffer when the mothers are more stressed, tired, or trying to find a new life for themselves. This decline in parental support usually corrects itself in a year. Another factor stressing children is the change in residence. Living with one parent and moving "back and forth" between the other parent can cause children to feel shuffled on vacations, holidays and weekends. Children are often caught in a "revolving door" of changing families, and being members in more than one household. This leaves the children without a real base of security.

Parental Alienation Syndrome (P.A.S.) describes parents who have extreme feeling of animosity toward their ex-spouse. This is a malicious and wilful attempt to undermined and destroy the parent child relationship. The behaviour includes unjustified and exaggerated criticisms of the ex-spouse. P.A.S. also includes brainwashing, whether done on conscious and unconscious levels. Usually, children exposed to P.A.S. profess to hate one parent and will refuse contact with that parent very suddenly. They usually can't justify the hatred when questioned, or respond weakly or with language that is untypical for a child. Another syndrome is Divorce Related Malicious Mother Syndrome (D.R.M.M.S.). This is even more severe than P.A.S., according to Gardner (1992). This is a syndrome that affects mothers more often than fathers, but in rare cases the father, too, can posses D.R.M.M.S characteristics. According to, three criteria must be met before making this diagnosis. First, the mother unjustifiably punishes her ex-spouse by attempting to alienated the children from the father. She often involves others in outrageous lies and malicious actions against the father, while engaging in continuous litigation's or threats of litigation's. A second diagnostic requirement is that the mother denies her children contact with the father by violating visitation, restricting phone calls, excluding the father from knowing about school activities and school functions. The third diagnostic requirement indicates that this is a repeating and continuing pattern, which includes vengeful acts toward the father, lying to the children and breaking the law, and feeling justified in doing these things.

It's also reported that girls are more sensitive in the situation when their parents are going to divorce. This usually effects their future greatly. Daughters from female-headed households are much more likely than daughters from two-parent families to themselves become single parents and to rely on welfare for support as adults. Living with a single mother at age 16 increases a daughter's risk of becoming a household head by 72 percent for whites and 100 percent for blacks. The contrast becomes even sharper if the comparison is between daughters continuously living in two-parent families with daughters living with an unmarried mother at any time between ages 12 and 16: 'Exposure to single motherhood at some point during adolescence increases the risk of a daughter's later becoming a household head by nearly 1 1/2 times for whites and by about 100 percent for blacks.' The public costs of this differential emerge in figures showing that a daughter loving in a single-parent household at any time during adolescence is far more likely (127 percent more likely among whites, 164 percent among blacks) to receive welfare benefits as an adult, compared to daughters from two-parent households. Researchers have known for some time that girls raised in a female-headed household are much more likely to become unwed teen mothers that are girls much raised in two parent families. In a major new study, Professor William Marsigilio of Oberlin College has documented a parallel pattern for unmarried teenage fathers. In a survey of more than 5,500 young American men, Dr. Marsigilio found that 'males who had not lived with two parents at age 14 were over represented in the subsample of teenage fathers. Only 17 percent of all young men surveyed lived in one-parent households at age 14; yet, among the boys who had fathered an illegitimate child as a teenager, almost 30 percent came from single-parent households. In other words, teen boys from one-parent households are almost twice as likely to father a child out of wedlock as teen boys from two-parent families.

So, it's quite evident, from the facts above, the problems connected with divorce are of vital importance nowadays and this process influences on the lives of children and their parents. But children are the main victims in this situation as they are not protected psychologically. Children don't have to suffer with life long scars of their parents divorce. Parents should always put bad feelings aside for the sake of the kids, because the children are part of both of you. Hopefully the children will grow up with a good relationship with both parents and will one day be able to acknowledge that their parents co-operated with each other because of their common love of their child.