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Spotlighting Teen Issues

for
Teens

When Parents Divorce

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Divorce is hard on everyone in the family, but it can be hardest for kids because they feel like they don't have any control over the situation. If your parents are divorcing, this information may help.

What Is Going to Happen to Me and My Family?

When parents in Tennessee divorce, they are required by law to make a Parenting Plan. This plan spells out how they will carry out their parenting responsibilities. They will make a plan for you to spend time with each of them, if it is safe for you, and they will decide how you will spend holidays and other special events like birthdays or vacations. As a teen, you are old enough to tell them what you would like, but your parents should have the final say. Let them know that it will help you to cope better if you know what to expect.

Was It My Fault?

Many teens think their parents' divorce is their fault; however, you cannot cause your parents to divorce. Your parents may disagree about how to raise you, and this can result in arguments. The real problem is that your parents haven't learned to handle their disagreements effectively — not that the argument is about you.

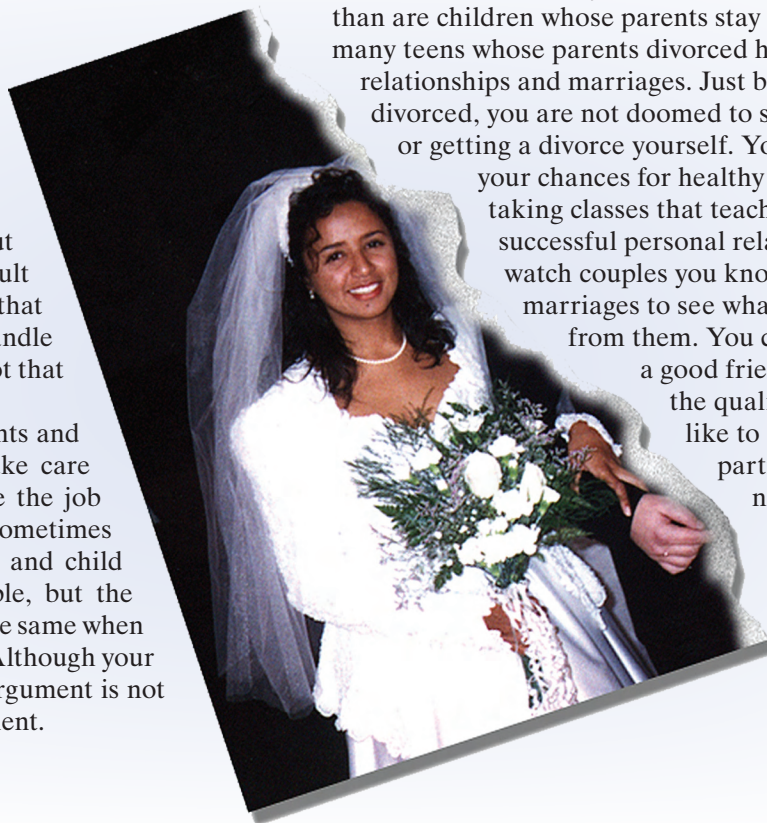
This is a little bit like when parents and children argue over who should take care of family pets. Children often have the job to feed and water their pets, but sometimes they forget or just get lazy. Parent and child may argue about who is responsible, but the argument is not the pet's fault. It is the same when parents argue about their children. Although your parents may argue about you, the argument is not your fault, even if you were disobedient.

How Can I Get My Parents Back Together?

The truth is you can't make your parents get back together any more than you can make them get a divorce. Some teens think that getting into trouble will force their parents to get back together. Other teens try to be perfect with the thought that if they are good, their parents might get back together. Some try to arrange situations where their parents will have to be together, hoping they will magically fall back in love. This rarely, if ever, works. The fact is that divorce is a decision that only parents can make and getting back together is also their decision.

Will I Get a Divorce If I Marry?

In general, it is true that children whose parents divorce are more likely to divorce or to avoid marriage than are children whose parents stay married. However, many teens whose parents divorced have very successful relationships and marriages. Just because your parents divorced, you are not doomed to staying single or getting a divorce yourself. You can improve your chances for healthy relationships by taking classes that teach you how to have successful personal relationships. You can watch couples you know who have strong marriages to see what you can learn from them. You can practice being a good friend and think about the qualities you would like to have in a marriage partner. Be careful not to rush into an intimate relationship or marriage. That can increase your chances of breaking up.



What Can I Do When My Parents Put Me in the Middle?

This happens a lot when parents divorce. Your parents may be so angry that they don't want to see or talk to each other directly. They think it is okay to send messages through you or to ask you about your other parent because you spend time with that parent. Sometimes they complain about the other parent to you. It is not good for parents to put you in the middle of their conflicts. You need to let your parents know how it makes you feel. Here are some ways you can tell your parents that you don't want to be put in the middle.

- I feel uncomfortable when you ask me to take messages to Dad because it makes me feel like the bad guy. I would like it if you would work out a way to get messages to him without sending them through me.
- I feel like a spy when you ask me questions about Mom because it makes me feel like I am being disloyal to her. I don't want to upset either one of you. If you want to know something about Mom, I wish you would ask her yourself.
- I don't like it when you say bad things about Dad to me. It almost feels like you are mad at me. I love both of you, and it hurts me when you say those kinds of things.

Will I Have to Give Up My Extra Activities?

When parents divorce, there is often less money to spend on extra things like art lessons, and parents may have a hard time working out their schedule for you to play sports. However, it is important that you continue to do things that you enjoy, if possible. Maybe you can think of some ways to save money in other areas, such as offering to cook dinner one night a week to cut back on eating out or choosing less expensive clothes. You might get a ride home from practice with a friend if your parent has a hard time picking you up. By showing that you are willing to work with your parents, you will be more likely to get to continue doing the things you like to do.

I Can't Talk to My Parents About the Divorce.

Many teens find it hard to talk to their parents about the divorce. It just hurts too much, or they don't think their parents will understand. If you feel uncomfortable talking with your parents about how you feel, find another adult you trust. It may be a teacher, guidance counselor, relative or your youth minister. Friends can also be helpful. Finding someone who will listen without getting upset or hurt will help you to talk things through. That will make you feel better.

For More Information

Here are some books and Websites that might help you.

MacGregor, C. (2004). *The Divorce Helpbook for Teens*. Impact Publishers.

Hunt, A.E. (2000). *Keeping Your Life Together When Your Parents Pull Apart: A Teen's Guide to Surviving Divorce*. Lincoln, Neb.: iUniverse.com

Dealing with Divorce and Separation: A Guide for Teens. Website at <http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/divorce.html>

Bonus Teens™ is a Web-based forum for teens to talk to other teens to find solutions to problems they have had with a divorce or separation in their lives. The "bonus" refers to additional family members created when parents remarry. Find it at <http://www.bonusfamilies.com/modules.php?name=BonusTeens>



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