

## MINIMIZING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A DIVORCE:

A divorce is a loss, a loss of a family unit living together.

When there is loss, there is grief.

When there is trauma there is grief.

When there is grief, **trauma can be avoided.**

| <u>Grief</u>                                      | <u>Trauma</u>   |
|---|---|
| Talking can be a relief.                          | Talking can be difficult or impossible.                       |
| One may say: "I wish my parents stayed together". | One may say: "This is my fault, I could have prevented this". |
| Anger is generally non violent.                   | Anger often becomes violent to others/self.                   |
| Reactions diminish over time.                     | Symptoms worsen over time or develop into health problems.    |

It's important to understand the differences between trauma & grief so that we can understand our child & help them when needed.

## MINIMIZING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A DIVORCE:

As parents we need to work on our relationship with our partners especially for the sake of the kids AND sometimes a divorce is necessary, especially for the sake of the kids.

It may take up to 3 years after a divorce until there is a fairly good adjustment for kids.\*

Children who are placed in the middle of the conflict between their parents suffer the most.\*

Having an adult a child feels completely comfortable to express how they feel & the feeling of **not being left alone with their experience** makes a HUGE difference.\*

Children suffer more than adults during a divorce, due to their developmental needs & dependence.\*

\*Dr. Hetherington, in her book called "For better or worse: Divorce reconsidered" did a study on this.

## MINIMIZING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A DIVORCE:

### Before announcing the divorce to our children:

- It's important to first **work through our own grief**, pain & anger - so that we don't burden our kids with how we feel.
- Plan out the **best time to share** about the divorce with the kids. Best to do this together.
- **Plan out & decide the details** of the changes that will be taking place. Make a list of the **things that will be staying the same & a list of the things that will be changing for our kids.**

## MINIMIZING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A DIVORCE:

### Announcing the divorce to our children:

- **Emotionally prepare child:**

"We have something to share with you that might be very hard for you to hear. You might feel sad or angry & we are here for you no matter how you feel."

- **Share the news & make sure they know they aren't the reason for the divorce:**

"We are divorcing, meaning we will no longer be a couple. Me and your father/mother will no longer be living together. We will each have our own home. This means that you will have two homes instead of one. Daddy/Mommy will be moving out & will always still be remaining your father/mother. We both love you & we will both be there for you even if we aren't living together. This is not because of anything you did or didn't do, this is a decision we took because we felt it would be best for our family."

Allow space for emotions to be processed. Don't rush to share all details. Let them feel how they feel. Go with THEIR flow.

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- **Share the details of what will be changing in their life & all the things that will be staying the same:**

- who will bring them to school/sports etc.
- who will tuck them in bed
- New room arrangements
- Holiday arrangements
- Social arrangements

Ask your child's input on how you can help them through these changes & help them take decisions within the changes if possible.

### Things to think about:

- **Babies can't make sense of a divorce, it can't be explained through words.** If possible what would be best for the baby is to have regular daily visits so that the baby sees both parents daily. This will allow the baby to feel secure & form a healthy attachment.
- **Don't put down the other parent to our child,** putting down our ex partner also puts down a part of our child - after all they are a part of them.
- Teenagers usually do fine with less frequent visits, however they **still need strong parental figures** in their life to guide them, set limits & be there for them.

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### Fantasies & fears a child might experience:

- "Magical thinking", is especially common in children between the ages of 4-11. Children hold these fantasies that their parents will one day reunite AND that they are, at least in part, to be blamed for the divorce. So because they feel that they have to do with the break up, they feel they are able to get their parents back together. We must be honest & eliminate all hopes they may have. Also important to share that they aren't responsible for our decision to divorce.
- A fear that many children feel is that if one parent left them, it's likely for the other parent to leave them as well. This is especially true for school aged children (6-12 yrs old) who fear that due to their behaviours their mother or father left them. This age group also has the capacity for vivid imagination. This is why it's important for the child to see both parents frequently.
- Children often fear who will take care of them & where do they belong? It's important for children to live at both homes & not feel like they are "visiting" one.
- Children might fear having to explain to teachers, friends etc. that they live in two homes. Discuss this openly & empower them to navigate such situations.

**MINIMIZING THE POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF A DIVORCE:**

**Books that can help us & our kids:**

Books for parents:

1. Mom's House Dad's House
2. Co parenting Through Divorce
3. Good parenting through your divorce

Books for kids:

1. Dinosaur's Divorce
2. The boys and Girls book about divorce
3. Parents are forever
4. It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear.