

FROM THE CREATORS OF FACING THE GIANTS

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DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE MYTHS

by Jeff and Judi Parziale

For adults, divorce brings a world to an end; for young children, whose lives are focused in the family, it seems to bring the world to an end. E. Mavis Hetherington, For Better or For Worse

Many parents do not appreciate the traumatic effects divorce can have. Children are impacted by divorce. The world they know has been turned upside-down. People they thought would be there forever are gone. The degree of impact depends on their parents willingness and to put the welfare of the children first.

Myth: Anger between parents ends with the divorce

Fact: Many couples fight at the same level of intensity even 5-10 years after their divorce. This can be devastating to children, who are often forced to take sides and who may never see a clear picture of positive adult relationships.

Myth: Children are resilient and bounce back in a few months without any negative consequences.

Fact: Actually, there is a higher degree of drug abuse and emotional-behavioral problems. School-related problems also tend to increase. Some children lose their ability to concentrate in school and become under-achievers. The trauma children experience can be substantial and long-lasting. When their dreams of a happy and loving home are broken, their security is shattered and their faith in adults is diminished.

Myth: Children do fine in new families.

Fact: Even after five years, fifty percent of children do not consider their new family an improvement. If they were given a choice, they would return to the family that failed. Children are not nearly as troubled by marital problems as adults. They assume adults will work out their differences, leaving the home intact. New families represent a new set of adjustments for children and most children are not ready to make these new adjustments.

Myth: Divorce is temporary; kids get over it quickly.

Fact: The first two years are the toughest; but for most children, the impact is experienced most, not in childhood, but in adulthood. Divorce is life-changing experience and a defining moment for many children.

Myth: Children will relate to each parent in the same way after the divorce.

Fact: Some parents become more attentive and indulgent, some more possessive and overprotective, others less emotionally available. Many noncustodial parents become more distant and less involved. Dating and involvement with other adults limits time. Established rules and routines change and discipline often becomes inconsistent. Visitation times can become more about indulging than nurturing. Custodial parents are often so wearied with the tasks of bread winning and single parenting that they are less attentive to their children's needs. New romantic interests make parents less available. Only one thing is certain, relationships will be



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changed and children will be impacted. Many children experience and increase in anxiety and stress, especially about a future seems less and less predictable.

Myth: If I'm happy, my kids will be happy

Fact: Most children want their parents to stay together; when they don't, they feel anxious, lonely, isolated, angry and afraid. "Happier" parents are not always better parents. New relationships take time and energy and can diminish parent involvement.

Myth: Divorce rescues children from an unhappy marriage

Fact: Most children feel "blind-sided"; they had no idea a divorce was imminent. Most assume parents will successfully resolve disagreements. Rather than relieved, most children feel rejected, abandoned or betrayed, and have a deep sense of sadness and loss. Many children mistakenly blame themselves. Children in very high conflict homes do seem to benefit from a divorce, since it stops the violence and/or abuse. However, in low-conflict marriages (the majority) that end in divorce, children tend to exhibit more emotional-behavioral symptoms.

Myth: My child will be better off if "he/she" is out of the picture.

Fact: Children seldom view a parent in the same way as an adult. Even if a parent is "out of the picture," they are always in the in the children's mind. Attempting to remove a parent from the child's life can actually harm the child. However, if a parent is abusive and represents a clear danger to a child, legal safeguards are available.

Myth: Because of their strong determination to avoid divorce, children of divorce tend to have a higher rate of success in their own marriages.

Fact: Marriages of the children of divorce actually have a much higher rate of divorce than the marriages of children from intact families. This is true because children learn about marital commitment or permanence by observing their parents. Their sense of commitment to a lifelong marriage has been undermined.

"It was just very hard to interact with my parents when I was growing up because they were separate. They were two different people, two different places, two different ideas." (adult child of divorce)

What can you do?

First, be sure you do not believe any of the above toxic myths. Second, take responsibility for your behavior. Third, please do not rush into a new relationship. Give yourself and your children time to heal.

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