

Best Techniques and Interventions to Aid Children's Resiliency During and After Their Parents' Divorce

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The Problem of Divorce

Nearly one million divorces occur in America each year. In a study published by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2012, a chart revealed that the amount of divorces from 2000-2009 hovered around 900,000 per year. However, those statistics excluded anywhere from four to six states that did not report their numbers on any given year (one of which includes California). Therefore, while it is unknown the exact amount of divorces that occur annually, it can be extrapolated that nearly or over one million divorces happen yearly.

Age does not seem to play a large factor in the divorce rates. Kennedy and Ruggles (2014) observed that the divorce rates in the America hovers at 50% across the age groups. Additionally, many of those marriages also include the birth of at least one child. In 2012, the United States Bureau of Census calculated that over a million children experience the divorce of a parental unit each year.

How Divorce Spreads

Culture also has an affect on people's perceptions about divorce. A study was conducted by Furtado, Marcen, and Sevilla (2013) that studied if immigrants who come to America from Europe under the age of five years old experience the average divorce rates mirroring those in their home country, or if they experience the divorce rates in America. While it can be hard to calculate divorce rates, this study took into account

over 20,000 immigrants ages 25 to 64 from 26 countries throughout Europe. The results indicated that the immigrants whose home culture had a lower divorce rate than America, such as Italy, experienced higher divorce rates in America if they did not reside in areas near other people from their home culture. Therefore, it seems that divorce may be higher in cultures that find it more acceptable, thus creating a social pressure to divorce instead of solve the problems occurring in the marriage (Furtado, Marcen, & Sevilla, 2013).

Furthermore, in a study conducted by McDermott, Fowler, and Christakis in 2013, indicated that people are more likely to divorce when their marriage encounters troublesome areas when their closest social friends have also divorced. It was stated that many times children's romantic relationships end in divorce during adulthood if they experienced the divorce of parents. However, it seems that the same example can be given within close friendships and social circles as well. The researchers even studied whether or not children had an effect on divorce, and they found that it does not make a difference if the couple has children or not. The social pull is so strong that it can override thinking about the children when deciding whether or not to stay together (McDermott, Fowler, & Christakis, 2013).

How Divorce Affects Children

Some studies report that at least 25% of adults ages 20 to 40 living in the United States experienced their parents' divorce as children (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007). Others say that as many as half of all children in America will experience their parents' divorce (Anthony, DiPerna, & Amato, 2014). Even further, Tartari (2015) presented that

nearly 40% of children will experience divorce in total, but annually 1.5 million children would be affected by divorce (Tartari, 2015). It can be difficult for a child to understand what is happening when his or her parents divorce. Children, especially children in elementary school, can have a difficult time understanding that their parents will no longer be living together and that they will have to spend their time between two different homes. Furthermore, since children may not completely understand this themselves, it can be exceedingly difficult for them to talk about how they feel about the situation with other people including counselors and school teachers (Mankiw & Strasser, 2013).

Known effects of divorce on children

During childhood, Relationally, with Parents

Divorce dissolves the family structure that the child was raised within. Most of the time after divorce, a child will live at least half of the time or more with one parent, and less than half of the time with the other parent. This is a large change from what the child was used to in living full time with both parents. Research indicates that the strain on the parent-child relationships lead to the child distancing him or herself from the parent that has the least amount of custody. These effects are even worse if there is a high amount of conflict between both parents. Part of this could occur when one parent speaks negatively about the other parent in front of the child, leading the child towards feelings of guilt in having a relationship with the other parent. Additionally, when a parent feels rejected by their child it could lead to behaviors that alienate or discourage the child, such as an increase in anger when with the child, the child feeling

forced to spend time with the parent, or the parent punishing the child for not wanting to spend time together (Polack & Saini, 2015).

However, marital dissolution can damage a child's relationship with both parents, not just the father. Wallerstein, Lewis, and Rosenthal (2013) conducted a longitudinal study, which focused on the changing relationship between child and mother after a divorce. Financial pressures that arise after a divorce lead many stay-at-home mothers to begin working, resulting in a strain on the child's maternal relationship as well as a change to the home structure that the child previously experienced, especially if the mother received primary custody of the child (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Rosenthal, 2013). Furthermore, Fields (2009) reports that the breakdown of a child's relationship with his or her father begins soon after the marriage dissolves. While fathers may make an effort to keep in touch and continually see their children in the weeks or months following divorce, after one year of divorce over 50% of children in Fields' study did not see their father within a one year time frame, and after ten years, 64% of fathers no longer had any contact with their children (Fields, 2014).

During Childhood, Relationally, with Peers

In 2013, Bretherton, Gullon-Rivera, Page, Oettel, Corey and Golby conducted a study to assess how preschoolers related to their peers after their parents' divorce. The study indicated that when a mother and child keep a strong relationship after the parents' divorce, it affects the way that the child interacts with fellow peers. If there is a strain on the parent-child relationship, then it negatively affects the way that a child interacts with his or her surrounding peers. If there is a positive relationship between the

parent and child, then the child is able to positively communicate with peers socially (Bretherton, Gullon-Rivera, Page, Oettel, Corey, & Golby, 2013).

During Childhood, Relationally, with Siblings

In 2007, Wallerstein and Lewis conducted a longitudinal study following how the amount of children in the family changes the dynamics of the parents' divorce. The study indicated a large difference in how siblings experience the divorce of their parents depending on the number of siblings in the family. For the study, the families were broken down into families with three or more children and families with two siblings.

The study documented that in families with three or more children, typically only one child functioned well with the divorce while the others experienced poor levels of functioning. Most of the time, the child that functioned well also had a strong, positive relationship with at least one parent. The majority of the time, it was the mother that the children had a strong relationship with, as the fathers in the study did not do well at maintaining relationships with their children. If the father was able to maintain a positive relationship with the children, it was typically only one of the children who tended to share similar interests and therefore the child seemed favored to the other siblings. Additionally, mothers with three or more children experienced a large amount of financial burden following the divorce, which led to a decrease in time spent with the children and attention given to the children throughout the day (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007).

On the other hand, families with two siblings experienced different results after their parents' divorce. The mothers did not feel the same amount of financial burden and were able to better provide for the children financially and emotionally. The fathers,

however, still tended to distance themselves from the children. Many of the fathers in the study only maintained relationships with the children if they shared similar interest or if the children were young and provided a high amount of attention and affection towards the father while spending time together. The older children, however, were not as affectionate and playful and therefore the fathers tended to not work at sustaining those relationships as well as they could have. This dichotomy between the siblings can also lead to anger and conflict between the siblings during and after the divorce process (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2007).

Further, in 2009 researchers Sun and Li studied how sibling size affected the academic achievement of children whose parents divorced. Much like the study by Wallerstein and Lewis, the study indicated that children who come from larger families experience a higher strain on resources following a divorce, both financially and emotionally (2007). Similarly, in the study by Sun and Li, the more children in a family, the more negatively affected academic achievement scores for the children in the family following divorce.

Psychologically throughout the Lifecycle

Behavioral problems and divorce

A common issue that children experience is the occurrence of ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). While no one is positive as to what causes ADHD, there are many theories. One of those theories is that divorce and ADHD correlate. In a study conducted by Heckel, Clarke, Barry, McCarthy, and Selikowitz (2013), the researchers studied the different types of family situations that can occur for children in-

cluding parents that are married, divorced, and remarried. The study focused on which situations increase the effects of ADHD in the child. The study indicated that when children are forced to constantly change environments, signs of ADHD increase. Therefore, parents that are married provide the most stable environment for children. While single-parent habitation is a change from two parents, it still does not lead to enough of a significant change to increase the effects of ADHD. However, when children are put into a new home where one parent remarries a new spouse, that leads to the highest levels of increase in ADHD.

In one study, researchers Weaver and Schofield (2015) conducted a longitudinal assessment over the span of fifteen years. In 1991, they gathered 1,364 mothers who had recently had children in 10 different hospitals across America and conducted a longitudinal study on whether or not divorce led to an increase in behavioral problems in the children. The study showed that children whose parents divorced showed significantly more externalizing behavioral problems which begin immediately following the separation of the parents and found these behavioral problems to be persistent for many years following divorce (Weaver & Schofield, 2015).

In a study conducted by Spigelman, Spigelman, and Engleson in 1991, they found that children ages twelve and younger who experienced divorce, both males and females, experienced significantly higher rates of anger, hostile behavior, and anxiety than other children. The researchers predict that these findings could have a long-term negative impact on the children of divorce (Spigelman, Spigelman, & Engleson, 1991).

Anxiety

Little research has been conducted on the prevalence of anxiety in young children following the divorce of parents. However, early onset anxiety can be a precursor to other mental disorders, and therefore needs to be considered. Wichstrom, Belsky, and Berg-Nielsen conducted a study to assess the likelihood of preschool-aged children developing anxiety disorders due to parental divorce. The researchers found that the prevalence of parental anxiety for a child at age four led to an increased risk that the child would have their own anxiety only two years later. Therefore, it should be assessed that parents experiencing marital problems or dissolution which leads to heightened levels of anxiety can also contribute to the anxiety levels and possible anxiety disorders of their children, even at ages as young as four years old (Wichstrom, Belsky, & Berg-Nielson, 2013).

Attachment Difficulties

Attachment theory is based on the concept that a present caretaker provides adequate protection and comfort to a child. This allows a child to feel secure enough to leave the environment and explore the outside world. If a child does not receive this secure kind of attachment because of a parent's lack of attention or abandonment, it leads to attachment issues in the child which affects not only the parent-child relationship, but also future romantic relationships. Therefore, it is vitally important that mothers and fathers (although mothers are primarily considered the main caretakers) to ensure they do not forget to show appropriate levels of care and affection to their children even though the family is going through an extremely difficult time (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010).

Intellectually

Cognitive effects on children

In one study conducted within a Greek preschool, Babalis, Yiota, Papa, & Tsolou (2011) researched the psychological and social adjustment of preschool children in a school setting. Out of the 60 participants, 30 participants had divorced parents, and 30 participants came from a nuclear family. The study indicated that there were significant differences in children from each type of family. Children whose parents divorced did not have a positive relationship with at least one of their parents (Babalis et al., 2011).

Additionally, the parents of these children demonstrated hostile communication patterns, which further signifies the importance of the co-parenting relationship and a child's relationship with both parents. Children who did not have a good relationship with one of the divorced parents also tended to have poorer satisfactory ratings in school, as well as difficulty concentrating, heightened levels of energy and aggressiveness, and speech problems (Babalis et al., 2011).

In 2013, Rappaport conducted a study on the longitudinal effects of divorce on children as compared to the longitudinal effects of children whose parents do not divorce but continue in a high-conflict relationship. In this study, he found that children of divorce may experience temporary increases in negative effects (such as increased stress levels, lower academic achievements, and behavioral issues) after experiencing divorce, but over time these effects diminish and the children are psychologically and behaviorally similar to other children whose parents have not experienced a divorce (Rappaport, 2013).

Academic achievement effects

It is not conclusive as to whether or not the age of the child during the divorce process has a significant impact on the negative effects of divorce on a child's academic achievement. However, it is statistically significant that children of many ages experience a diminished rate of achievement in school during and after the divorce of parents. Anthony, DiPerna, and Amato researched this topic in 2014.

In their study, they measured how children whose parents divorced performed in the areas of mathematics and reading as compared to children whose parents had not divorced. The findings showed that the difference between the two groups in the area of reading was not significant, and while there was a significant difference between the mathematics measurements, the affect was small. There was also indication that girls experienced worse test scores in mathematics as compared to other girls whose parents did not divorce and all boys. The researchers also noted that children older than ten years of age experienced a slight decline in both test scores if their parents had divorced, possibly indicating that older children experience higher negative affects of divorce in the classroom (Anthony, DiPerna, & Amato, 2014).

In further regards to whether or not the age of the child at the time of divorce leads to poor educational achievement, Sigle-Rushton, Lyngstad, Andersen, and Kravdal (2014) performed an experiment of 49,879 children from 23,655 families in Norway to study whether a child from the same family experienced different academic results based on the age at the time of divorce. Interestingly, their findings were extremely questionable. While some of the results showed that if a child's parents divorced after the child was 16 years old, it would not negatively affect the academics, when the re-

searchers accounted for birth order, they found quite the opposite to be true. In the conclusions, the researchers did not feel comfortable presenting any significant statistics due to the volatile state of the data. They summarized by stating that further research would need to be conducted due to the sensitive nature of the subject (Sigle-Rushton, Lyngstad, Andersen, & Kravdal, 2014).

How Divorce Affects Children Into Adulthood

During Adulthood, Relationally, with Parents

Children may experience negative interactions with their fathers after a divorce for other reasons as well. Recent research by Kalmijn (2015) noted that 70% of divorced fathers remarry, which may subsequently cause significant problems for the father-child relationship. The study indicated that once a father remarries, he is much less involved in his children's lives, especially if he has children with his new partner. The remarriage has a negative effect on the child's perception of his or her father, especially if the divorce and remarriage occur during the child's adolescence (Kalmijn, 2015; Noel-Miller, 2013). Furthermore, the effects of divorce on children last for 20 years after the end of the marriage, as notated by Ahrons (2007). Even more, over those two decades, the children tend to drift away from their father and describe the remarriage of the father to be more stressful than the divorce of their parents. The relationship with the mother, however, tends to stay strong (Ahrons, 2007).

Kalmijn (2015) found that the longer amount of time that children live with both parents during childhood, the stronger their relationship remains in later years after the parents' divorce. In the same way, if divorce happens early on in a child's life and the

child lives for a longer period of time with a stepmother or stepfather, then it is more likely that the child will remain closer to the parents, not only in proximity but also relationally, that he or she lived with as opposed to biological parents (Kalmijn, 2015).

During Adulthood, Relationally, with Siblings

Many people stop thinking about how parental divorce affects children once those children have become adults. One subject in particular that frequently gets ignored includes that of the sibling relationship after parents divorce during adulthood. Greenwood (2014) focused on this aspect of the divorce process and looked at the different situations that could happen in this instance. In this study, Greenwood looked at qualitative data on how divorce affected different sibling relationships. For many siblings, if their relationship was relatively decent before the divorce, then the situation only deepens the relationship between siblings. The majority of the time the siblings support each other. However, the times when it does negatively affect the relationship includes when siblings feel the need to take opposing sides due to the terms of the divorce, therefore one sibling takes the side of the mother and the other takes the side of the father. However, overall siblings grow closer to each other during parents' divorce (Greenwood, 2014).

In Adulthood, Relationally, with Romantic Partners

Not only does divorce affect a child's relationship with his or her parents, but it can also negatively affect future romantic relationships as well. In 2014, Fergusson, McLeod, and Horwood conducted a study focusing on how parents separating or divorcing before a child reaches age 15 can affect the child's future romantic relationships.

The researchers noticed a significant association between parental separation or divorce before a child reaches age 15 and the number of cohabitations and marriages the child subsequently experienced during adulthood; parental separation or divorce predicted an increased number of cohabitation or marriage relationships for children. This research also found an increased instance of negative relationships with romantic partners and a higher number of problems in a given relationship for the children of divorced or separated parents. Unfortunately, parental separation or divorce also seemed to have a correlation to an increased amount of violence in the relationships that a participant engaged in over the course of the study (Fergusson, McLeod, & Horwood, 2014).

Interestingly, these negative effects did not change dependent on the particular age or gender of the child. Researchers analyzed the differences between parental divorce or separation when a child was 0-5 years old, 6-10 years old, and 11-15 years old. However, the negative effects did not change for males or females, nor did they change across the given age groups (Fergusson, McLeod, & Horwood, 2014).

How Divorce Affects Children Spiritually

There could be many reasons as to why children who experience parental divorce experience an affect on their spiritual lives. As documented in a study by Ellison, Walker, Glenn, and Marquardt (2011), regardless of a child's religious beliefs, the impact of divorce on a child's life has a significant possibility of the child abandoning their organized religion by adulthood. Part of the could occur due to the lower rates of church attendance following divorce or to the lack of involvement from parents in the child's religious experiences. However, overall the children who experience high conflict parental

interaction, whether the parents are married or divorced, are more likely to have a negative viewpoint of religion, attend church less often, and identify as spiritual but not religious (Ellison, Walker, Glenn & Marquardt, 2011).

a) Intellectually

Westman (1983) reported that while two-thirds of people eventually cope with the effects that divorce had on their family in prior years, one-third of people who experienced divorce in their teenage years do not cope with the loss of the family structure and remain negatively affected. Additionally, Westman outlines the thought process that accompanies many teenagers during a period of time following the parental divorce. First, the child grieves the loss of the parental relationship. Next, there are feelings of guilt, wondering whether or not the child had a part in the dissolution of the marriage. After that, the child tends to feel ashamed of the state of his or her family, especially around friends whose families are still together, and possibly resentment towards parents of what happened. Unfortunately, if a child is not guided through all of these emotions, then it could be increasingly difficult for him or her to recover from the impact of the divorce. Even further, since a child has been modeled leaving a situation when it becomes difficult through the divorce process, many children begin to break commitments and give up on activities at the first sign of difficulty (Westman, 1983).

Additionally, it needs to be noted that divorce can further intensify negative behaviors that were already occurring within a child. One reason is because of the lack of attention that these older children receive during the process of divorce. It has been seen to manifest in three different ways: increasing pre-existing problems of academic

problems and emotional issues, bringing about temporary rebellion in children through activities such as premarital sex, drug use, and dropping out of school, and emotional regression that led to intense depression, anger, or anxious feelings (Westman, 1983).

What Parents Can Do Now

Importance of Forgiveness

Perhaps the most important intervention that any child can implement in their lives is the ability to forgive his or her parents for the pain caused during the divorce process. Forgiveness is an important step to take for people who have been deeply hurt by people they love dearly. It allows the release of resentment and harbored feelings of aggression or anger as well as other negative thoughts. In one study conducted by Graham, Enright, and Klatt in 2012, they found that children who could forgive their parents experienced higher levels of self-esteem, lesser feelings of anger and anxiety, and better relationships with others. In this specific study, the tactic of forgiveness was taught to participants through the teachings of a book accompanied by weekly homework exercises and topics to discuss with friends or family members. Participants were held accountable through weekly emails with their counselor (Graham, Enright, & Klatt, 2012).

Furthermore, there is a strong correlation in regards to coparenting and forgiveness. When a child's parents are able to forgive each other, even if it is one sided, it provides a better coparenting experience which in turn allows the child to be surrounded by a more comforting environment. Additionally, when a child experiences his or her parent forgiving the other parent after a traumatic experience such as divorce, it

models a good example of forgiveness to the child as well and teaches the child that there is not a need to harbor anger (Rohde-Brown & Rudestam, 2011).

Should parents divorce?

Benefits of staying married

There has been a long debate about whether or not it is better for the children for the parents to divorce or to stay married. As noted in the study in 2015 by Polack and Saini, mothers and fathers who are involved in a high-conflict marriage are less attentive, less compassionate, and less affectionate to their children while also having a higher amount of anger in their interactions with the children. Instead, mothers and fathers who felt that they had a positive marital relationship were better able to provide a secure caregiving platform for their children (Polack & Saini, 2015).

However, if parents decide to divorce due to high levels of conflict in the marriage, and the conflict continues into the co-parenting relationship, then it can lead to further development and adjustment issues in the child than had the parents stayed married. One of the reasons for the increase in negative issues is due to the introduction of the absence of one parent, typically the father. Furthermore, if the main parent remarries into a stepfamily, it can lead to even further struggles with the biological child who now feels the need to compete with the step-parent for the time and attention of the biological parent (Polack & Saini, 2015).

As noted in Sobolewski and Amato's study, children's well-being is at its highest when they are in a two-parent household with low-conflict (Sobolewski & Amato, 2007). Furthermore, Tartari presented that the largest predictor of increased aggression, be-

havioral problems, depressive symptoms, low levels of self-esteem, and lower levels of academic performance are actually linked to children living around high levels of conflict, not necessarily children experiencing divorce or separation of their parents. To solidify this, Tartari presented research stating that poor academic achievement was matched by children whose parents were currently divorced and children whose parents divorced in later years, as compared to higher levels of academic achievement in children whose parents never divorced.

Additionally, Tartari performs a study to indicate whether or not children would be better off if their parents had stayed together instead of divorcing. In her study, she indicates that children would spend about 2 more hours weekly with their father and 3 more hours weekly with their mother when parents do not divorce. Also, when parents do not divorce, children receive an additional \$5200 per year in resources available. Therefore, if parents are able to resolve their conflict in the home and around the children, there is not only greater emotional gains for the child, but also greater financial and academic gains.

Even further, in Tartari's research, when the option of divorce was completely taken out of the equation for a family, the parents tended to work out their conflicts and stay together in a more accommodating relationship, not only for the parents, but also more accommodating for the children. The reason for this is because when divorce is seen as an option, then one or both of the parents tend to lean towards the scenario that will provide them the greatest amount of immediate relief. However, when divorce

is not an option, then the scenario that will provide the greatest amount of relief would be to resolve the conflict and work on cooperating with each other (Tartari, 2015).

Overall, each child differs in how they react to the proceedings of divorce. Divorce is not the only instance in which a child would be part of a single-parent household and, interestingly, similar negative effects can be experienced by children in these situations as well which include deployment, death, and incarceration. However, there is so much research surrounding the different outcomes for children and how divorce might harm or help the child due to the environment, but in the end, each child is different. One thing that many studies agree on is that it is more important for a child to be in an environment with low rates of conflict, whether the parents are divorced, separated, or married (Amato & Anthony, 2007).

If divorce does occur, working out custody

However, some parents seeking out divorce have a top priority to have the best divorce experience possible for their children. The top two aspects of the divorce process that makes the largest difference for how the children experience divorce includes the relationship that the parents have with each other during and after the process, which includes the ability to co-parent well and without hostility, as well as the relationship that a child keeps with both parents following the divorce. If a child can keep consistent and frequent contact with the non-resident parent, it increases the ability for the child to cope well with the divorce. Additionally, children experience great benefit from both parents having similar rules in their households, keeping a consistent contact with each other, and not seeking to undermine or disrespect the wishes of the other parent.

while the child is away (Amato, Kane, & James, 2011). Also, it is important for both parents to be equally present in the child's life if there is shared custody, as opposed to the standard rate that the mother has the children anywhere from 70-80% of the time (Cancian, Meyer, Brown, & Cook, 2014).

Summary and conclusions

What works and where

As noted by Polack and Saini, every divorce is different and needs to be treated in a unique manner. Therefore, implementing the use of only one intervention technique to help children recuperate from the effects of divorce is not the most effective plan of action. Instead, using a mixed modality of individual and family therapy, school-based programs, interactional programs, and other forms of expression for children will lead to the best results (Polack & Saini, 2015).

Directions of future programs and research

It is difficult to foresee the future of how divorce will affect children because an increasing number of people are entering into cohabitation instead of a marital union. Future research should focus on whether the dissolution of cohabitation leads to differing outcomes on children than a divorce. Additionally, research should also be conducted that studies whether or not a child living in the midst of parents' cohabitation, instead of marriage, leads to negative affects on future relationships, marriage, or psychological experiences. While the rise of cohabitation may lead to lower divorce rates, it does not mean that fewer relationships will dissolve. Unfortunately, it more than likely means that the dissolution of relationships will be more frequent and entail less consequences for

the parents and less protection for the children involved (Kennedy & Ruggles, 2014; Tach & Eads, 2015).

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