

Preparing Your Child For Divorce

By Jacqueline Singer

How children cope with divorce will depend on their temperament, age, developmental ability to understand what is happening, and their emotional maturity. Infants and toddlers are most vulnerable to changes in daily routines, as well as hostility between parents, and the psychological disequilibrium of parents.

A predictable stable routine is extremely important for the preschool-age child and should be maintained as much as possible after a divorce.

Separation from a parent can be particularly difficult for a preschooler who already may be struggling with the developmentally important attainment of independence from his or her parents.

The intellectual or cognitive development of early elementary school children allows them to understand more issues of their parents' divorce. They can more actively fantasize and they often worry about being abandoned by the custodial parent. Hostility between parents disturbs the elementary-age child's sense of family.

Adolescence is a difficult phase even under the best of circumstances. Although they are dealing with emancipation from the family during this stage, teenagers from divorced homes often are thrust out of the family before they are ready. They often blame themselves for the divorce, feel guilty about it, and are especially vulnerable to parental needs for loyalty. Dealing with parental dating and remarriage is particularly axing for their group, especially given the emergence of their own sexuality.