

Signs of Stress of Children Trying to Adjust to Parental Separation or Divorce

By Jacqueline Singer

Parents should monitor a child's development for changes that are more intense than expected at a given age, last longer than expected, or interfere with the child's normal growth and change. When concerns arise, consult a mental health professional experienced with divorce and its effect on the family.

Babies & Toddlers

Watch for changes in daily routines: temper tantrums or regression in toilet training or sleeping through the night. They are especially sensitive to parental arguments and fighting.

Preschoolers

May exhibit sadness, inappropriate anger, an uncommon number of fears, or discomfort in social situations. They need a predictable and stable routine after a divorce.

School-age Children

Feel a profound sense of loss on a variety of levels. They may be increasingly fearful, lose interest in school and social activities, and become withdrawn. They may hide their feelings, making it more difficult to see that they are distressed.

Teens

Often blame themselves for the divorce and may show distress through declining academic performance, social isolation, trouble in school or with the law, and deteriorating relationships with parents.