

## additional tips *continued*

- *Reinforce that the divorce has nothing to do with them. It is not their fault.* Children often blame themselves for their parents' difficulties.
- *Talk directly to your ex-spouse* about any problems between the two of you. Do not use children as a communication link.
- *Do not degrade your spouse or ex-spouse to your children.* Rather, allow and encourage them to continue to love the other parent.
- *Cooperate as co-parents.* Set clear and consistent visitation schedules. Keep your promises.
- *Children need to know that their mother and father will still be their parents even though the marriage is ending* and the parents will no longer be living together. Long disputes or battles over custody can be harmful for children. Divorce is between the parents, not parents and children.

## Help is available

Aspirus Employee Assistance Services has counselors available to help you and your family. You can call the confidential helpline 24 hours a day at:

715.848.4357 ~ 800.236.4457  
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## Children and Divorce



tips for helping children  
accept divorce



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*Parents who are divorcing often worry about the effect the divorce is having on their children. These parents may be preoccupied with their own problems, yet realize that the divorce is also affecting their children. Fortunately, parents can, with awareness and sensitivity, make a positive difference in how their children experience the divorce.*

## each child reacts differently

While parents may be either devastated or relieved by the divorce, children are often frightened and confused by the threat to their security. Most children do not want to believe that the divorce is happening. Even when they see conflict, they tend to believe the situation is no better or worse than that in other families. They may be quite surprised by the news of a separation and divorce.

It is important to be aware that children of different ages will react differently. Children between ages 5 and 8 tend to blame themselves and are likely to be more openly sad. Children between the ages of 9 and 12 tend to express their anger and resentment and will often side with one parent or the other.

## symptoms of stress

Parents should be aware of the stress that the events surrounding a divorce cause for the child. Persistent signs of stress in a child include loss of motivation for school, for making friends or for having fun. Other warning signs include sleeping too much or too little, being unusually rebellious, argumentative or withdrawn.

## recognizing your child's feelings

Divorce is a big adjustment. Children as well as adults need time to become accustomed to the changes occurring in the family. Feelings of denial, fear, guilt, and sadness are common as well as sorrow, yearning, despair, fatigue and anger. In general, parents can expect a lot of emotion, either expressed directly or acted out in some way.

## discussing the breakup

Most experts agree that children should be spared the details. They want to love and be loved by both parents and hearing stories of how bad one or the other parent is can be devastating. Avoid criticizing the other parent in the children's presence. On the day one parent moves out, make arrangements for the children to be elsewhere. Make sure plans are in place for their first visit to the departing parent's new home.



## additional tips for helping children accept divorce

- When the decision to separate has been made, *be open and honest with children* about the plans. It is best if both parents explain the decision together.
- *Listen to and acknowledge their feelings.* Be aware of non-verbal as well as verbal expression of emotions. Young children especially may need help identifying their own strong feelings.
- Remember that *the immediate time after learning of the divorce may be the most emotionally charged period*, including strong feelings of anger, sadness, embarrassment, confusion, denial, fear, guilt and shame.