



The Family Place Parent Child Center

319 US Route 5 South • Norwich, VT 05055 • 802-649-3269 • 800-639-0039 • info@the-family-place.org • www.the-family-place.org

Divorce and Separation Impact Children and Adults Differently

Children and Divorce: Helpful Tips for Coping

Divorce affects many people, not just the couple ending a marriage, but also the children and extended family. The impact of a divorce is different for each person involved. Children face multiple changes. For children, divorce can affect how they feel about themselves. Children's responses to events are shaped by how capable, significant and worthy they think they are. Children with high self-esteem have a sense of security about themselves and their immediate world.



How positive self-esteem is built and lost

Child development experts agree that positive self-esteem is developed in young children in many ways. One way includes positive feedback from one's environment and those in it. It is enhanced when a person has successes and positive experiences. It is for this reason that positive feedback from parents throughout the divorce process is crucial.

When divorce or separation occurs, children don't know what to expect. Consequently, it tends to unsettle them and to create some feelings of insecurity. This is a normal reaction. As children experience that things are becoming stable their sense of security begins to return.

On the other hand, when children are exposed to intense conflict and feuding between the two people in their lives who represent their security, they may suffer long-term traumas associated with the conflict. Research has proven that there is a direct correlation between high parental conflict, and low self-esteem. The higher the parental conflict the lower the children's self-esteem.

Young children base their identity on how they perceive both of their parents. Children's beliefs about themselves are developed in many ways, with two of the stronger factors being their beliefs of who their mother and father are. According to information from West Central Behavioral Health, in Lebanon NH, when children are exposed to hearing the faults of one of their parents they begin to believe that some of these faults are within themselves as well. Healthy self-esteem in children during a divorce is contingent upon how parents choose to act.

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What parents can do to promote healthy self-esteem

- **Spend time with your child** in meaningful activities that they enjoy with opportunities that encourage communication.
- **Encourage** them to express all of their feelings, especially sad and angry feelings. Resolution comes with going through the pain, not avoiding feelings. Read books to your child about feelings and change, to create a stage for discussion.
- **Offer praise** for their attempts and accomplishments. When praise is meaningful and specific to the activity, children learn to trust that you mean what you are saying. Throughout the divorce process, reassure children that the divorce is not their fault.
- **Listen** attentively to their concerns and worries about the new family dynamic. Make sure you make eye contact with them while they speak. Let them say what they think and feel without judgment.

Grieving Process

The emotional journey following a divorce can be difficult for both the adults and the children. Both adults and children go through a grieving process. However, children and adults don't feel loss the same way and the experience of loss can be different from person to person. The feelings experienced after a loss such as divorce is similar to the loss of a loved one to death.

Children's Reactions

Divorce and custody changes are extremely significant issues for children to handle and they may react in a variety of ways based on their age and development. Some common reactions include clingy behavior, aggression, withdrawal, low tolerance, as well as eating and sleeping problems and other physical complaints.



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