

Divorced Good at Parenting



Parenting: Tips to Help You Help Your Children Cope after the Divorce

[Seven Tips to Parenting from Afar](#)

Fourteen years after she and her ex-husband decided to divorce, Lori Quaranta still knows for sure that the age-old parental theory to stay in a failing marriage “for the kids,” just does not cut it.

“I must say that if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn’t stay together for my daughter,” Quaranta, 50, of Shelton, Conn., said of her 21-year-old, Lindsay. “Growing up in a house with anger, arguing, and a lack of love and affection between parents is more damaging to kids than their parents divorcing.”

And according to a recent study, Quaranta just might be onto something. Dr. Lisa Strohschein spearheaded a study published in the October issue of the journal “Family Relations,” which says that divorced parents do just as well at raising their children as a married couple.

Strohschein, a sociologist at the University of Alberta in Canada, said her findings proved that children of married versus divorced parents “revealed no difference in nurturing, consistent or punitive parenting between the two groups of parents.” “So, divorced parents are neither worse parents prior to divorce nor after a divorce has occurred,” said Strohschein, who examined the data as part of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth.

But Strohschein is not the first person to break the mold and point out that many children are doing just fine despite the fact that they come from a split home. In 1979, Dr. Constance Ahrons, author of “The Good Divorce,” conducted a 20-year longitudinal study where she interviewed parents three times during a five-year period, and then talked to the adult children 20 years later. Her study showed that 80 percent of the now-adult children have grown to be emotionally stable and successful adults.

Stability may come, Strohschein said, from the fact that what many parents don’t know is that divorce can often come as a relief to children. “If parents are worried about the effect of divorce on the mental health of their kids, they should know that their kids are probably already having problems well before the divorce itself occurs,” Strohschein said. “Both family conflict and parental depression affect child mental health. “So, some of the effects of divorce are felt early – as parents begin to disengage from one another, they are likely to fight more often and be unhappy, and these family dynamics influence kids’ mental health just as much as divorce would.”

HOW TO PLAY NICE

During a 2005 interview on “Anderson Cooper 360,” Ahrons said there are “two elements to a good divorce.” “One is that the parents get along sufficiently well that they can focus on their kids as parents and be parents,” Ahrons said. “And the other element is that children continue to have relationships with both parents.” Ahrons asserts, however, that, while divorce is never “good,” there are simply better ways to divorce in an effort to ease future problems for children.

Adryenn Ashley, author of “Every Single Girl’s Guide to Her Future Husband’s Last Divorce,” couldn’t agree more with that assertion. In fact, Ashley often leans on examples such as Bruce Willis and Demi Moore to help explain this concept to parents contemplating divorce. “Parents really need to think like this couple,” Ashley said, referring to the exes who are known for raising their children as a team, celebrating holidays as a family and even vacationing together. “You have to put your kids first,” Ashley said. “Whatever your issues are – put them aside.”

What’s more, Ashley says parents who think that staying in a marriage is beneficial to the family, “really are not thinking about it in the long-term. “If you can have a separate relationship and be nice, then the kids are better off,” Ashley said.

Using children as a reason to stay in a marriage is something that Dr. Elinor Robin, a Florida certified mediator and family therapist, actually cautions parents against. “What an unfair burden to put on a child,” said Robin, who is also the co-director of a

degrees.info advertisement

I want to become a...

[Click here to find out how.](#)

Growing up in a house with anger, arguing and a lack of love and affection between parents is more damaging to kids than their parents divorcing.

Florida-based divorce mediation center, A Friendly Divorce. "If the child ever gets wind of 'I stayed in this unhappy marriage and lived my life without life because of you,' well, that is not good at all."

Keeping a relationship with children separate from problems with a spouse, Robin said, is what every parent should be aiming for before and after divorce. "We do not want to use a child as a support system, but on the other hand we don't want to treat a child like they don't understand what's going on – because they do," Robin said.

Like Robin, Ashley said that, "Kids are like barometers. They can smell it, they can sense it – they don't miss a thing." But several experts, including Deborah Moskovitch, author of "The Smart Divorce," agree that although children do notice parental tension, there are specific measures parents can take in order to ensure an easier time for them, including making sure that children understand they are loved and will not be put in the middle of the conflict.

"Some parents are so angry at the decision behind the separation that they want to tell the children," Moskovitch said. "But doing so can destroy the children's relationship with their parents and cause long term emotional scars. The worst thing parents can do is make their children feel like they have to take sides."

PULL IT TOGETHER

Moskovitch, who coached her three children through her own divorce, said parents can help their children by:

- 1.) Talking to the children together
- 2.) Giving children time to react, time to be mad and sad, and time to ask questions. If you have more than one child, each may want to speak with you separately.
- 3.) Anticipating the children's questions and reactions, and being prepared to respond.
- 4.) Encouraging your children to talk about their feelings.

"Children need routine and structure," Moskovitch said. "This needs to continue even though your thoughts are elsewhere." Quaranta said she also learned several things from her divorce, and now tries to keep in mind that "at one point in time you did love each other enough to bring your children into the world."

"You need to love [children] enough to continue to be the same two parents to them as you were in the past," Quaranta said. According to Moskovitch, Ashley and Robin, parental counseling should also be an important aspect to a couple who is mulling over the idea of a divorce. "Before you pull the trigger on something as serious as divorce – counseling will give you some insight," Ashley said.

Counseling is the key says Dr. Karen Sherman, author of "Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, and Make It Last." Sherman said professional intervention is important for couples considering divorce because it will keep children from asking, "wasn't I important enough for you to at least do something?"

In addition to mediation, Robin has also refers couples to her "50 Tips for Divorcing Parents" a list of several suggestions, including how to successfully co-parent and discuss your feelings with your child. The complete list can be found on Robin's Web site, www.AFriendlyDivorce.com.

"If you want to have an amicable divorce and do what is in the best interest of the children, then honesty and compromise are critical," Moskovitch said. "Be honest what your finances are and compromise as to what your goals are. Parents have an obligation to support their children both financially and emotionally."

HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Ashley said that in order for parents to be successful in raising their children, even though they are no longer together, they must be "unrestricted, unfettered parents – it has to be a free for all."

Put simply, Ashley explained, a child has to be able to, for example, see a funny television show while visiting one parent and feel like it is OK that he wants to call his other parent and tell him or her about the show. "Every child believes in his heart that he is half mommy and half daddy," Ashley said. "If you say something bad about mommy, then he is going to feel like you are saying something bad about him. "You can have a good divorce, but you just have to be two really mature parents."

Quaranta maintains that she and her ex acting like grown ups is what helped her daughter recognize that her parents' divorce was the best option in the end. It is important, Quaranta said, that "both parents are on speaking terms and can be in the same room when it is necessary for their kids." It is vital that these meetings are done, however, "without demonstrating any stress levels that will be felt by their kids," Quaranta said.

Moskovitch, like Quaranta, stands by her belief that children's best interest must always be put first. "Children are the ones who live out divorce," Moskovitch said. "Parents should want to give their children a 'normal' life, so that they see themselves as regular kids, not children of divorce. "I've learned that no matter how difficult things become, I must always look at how my children are going to be affected by certain situations. In many circumstances, I must rise above and put my emotions on the shelf, so that my children are not involved and affected."

Robin suggests that parents must also realize that divorce is a reality-check for children. "There is a loss of innocence involved in divorce where the happily ever after is just gone," Robin said. But Quaranta suggests that the simple recognition of this theory is the key-factor to helping kids become successful products of divorce. "My daughter will always wish that her father and I never divorced, but she also knows that we are always here for her, together when necessary, and that she will make sure that any relationship she is in is for the right reason and that it will last."

SEVEN TIPS FOR PARENTING FROM AFAR

Whether afar is across town or across the country these tips will help any parent who is not currently sleeping under the same roof as his or her children. If you have not done so already, call a truce with your Ex. (Note: Your Ex does not have to take the same action.)

1. Set up web cams on your computer and your kids' computers. Make sure that your kids have cell phones with your number programmed in. And, learn to send them text messages.
2. Watch TV together. Let your children know that you will be watching their favorite shows and be ready to talk about these shows.
3. Keep up with schoolwork. Send teachers pre-addressed, stamped manila envelopes so that it's easy to send you updates. If you hear nothing be sure to initiate communications with teachers by telephone and email.
4. Make audio and videotapes for your kids and encourage them to make them for you. If you have nothing to say, simply record yourself reading a book and then mail both the book and the tape.
5. Remember small events. Send cards, pictures and letters for Halloween, Valentine's Day, July 4th, etc.

Source: AFriendlyDivorce.com

Caroline Shannon has been a journalist for seven years. In addition to writing for several publications, including the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and Observer-Reporter, Caroline is a lover of all things related to health and nutrition. She has been a runner for more than 10 years and is a certified Pilates instructor. Caroline lives in Pittsburgh with her fiancé and two kittens, Emerson and Cooper. She can be reached at caroline.shannon@hotmail.com.