



PLAY THERAPY NEWS

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Children and Divorce

Latest US statistics state that 37% of marriages end in divorce (US Census Bureau). Other sources assert that this number is now between 40 to 60% (AAMFT). It is vital to recognize the outcome of family changes on children's lives. Divorce propels adults and children into many adjustments and challenges. Fortunately, the majority of kids weather the transition to become competent adults. However, a quarter of children

whose parents divorce experience ongoing emotional/behavioral difficulties. Parental conflict hinders kid's adjustment; good co-parenting skills are essential. Even so, children may still face feelings of sadness, anger, fear and confusion related to family separation. It is important that children find a means of self-expression at this time. Play therapy helps kids work through these emotions in a safe and healing environment.



Play is a major avenue for learning to manage anxiety. It gives the child a safe space where they can experiment at will, suspending the rules and constraints of physical and social reality.

In play, the child becomes master rather than subject - Play allows the child to transcend passivity and to become the active doer of what happens around them.

—Alicia F. Lieberman,
author, *The Emotional Life of a Toddler*.

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Anger and Divorce

The good news is that kid's initial anger response to a family break does melt into acceptance, but only if you are there to receive it. Children may think that, if they stay angry just long enough, the parents will resume their relationship. Anger also serves to cover the pain of loss. When the child does finally accept family changes, a bond with the alienated parent can be re-negotiated, but only when the child is ready. Angry behavior should be addressed, dealt with fairly and dismissed. Parents must have some patience while dealing with this abrasive manner and not take it too personally. Acting out behavior is due to a loss of control over forced changes and fears that the child has little control over their future. Play therapy can help kids express these feelings in creative ways to help increase the movement towards letting go of anger.

Dating After Divorce: What it Means for Kids

Many young people feel confusion and anxiety when parents, eager for some measure of happiness and success in a relationship, take on a new love interest. The reason is simple: the reality sets in that their parents are never going to get back together. The power of the reunion fantasy is common. A child's identity is very much tied to that of his family. When that family dissolves, a child's sense of self is threatened, even if they maintain

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HAPPY "HEART" DAY

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strong ties to both parents. Therapists who work with children of divorce agree that family separations lead kids to doubt who they are, from where they come and where their lives may be headed. This is why it is crucial that parents use a truthful, open dialogue with kids regarding their romantic involvements, as this will further complicate their life changes.

Single parents often ask when it is best to introduce a love interest to kids. It not a good idea to casually present every date to a child. But it is equally important to avoid minimizing the real significance of a new relationship. Children may feel deceived when a serious situation finally reveals itself. Due to anxiety-provoking life changes related to a past divorce and possibly feeling closer to a parent than before the break, children may perceive that a trust has been broken just when they need reassurance and security the most.

Before dating starts:

- Realize that most kids will view dating as a threat to their own personal time with you.
- Be verbally clear that adults need time with other adults, but that the child is the most important person in your life.
- Create a "sacred space" of regular parent-and-kid time without the love interest. A play therapist can give great ideas for activities.
- Choose a setting during an activity to introduce your friend; a ballgame or play ground. This is easier for children than making conversation with a stranger at a restaurant.

Divorce-Related Resource Corner

Great Book for kids:

Dinosaurs Divorce (Paperback)

by [Marc Brown](#) and [Laurie Krasny Brown](#)

Copy and paste these links into your browser:

http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/help_child_divorce.html

<http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatr;110/5/1019>