



COPING WITH DIVORCE

A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS

INTRO

We all like to imagine that every marriage is forever, but unfortunately sometimes parents split up and get divorced for a number of reasons. No matter what the reason, it is still a very difficult time for all involved, from the parents themselves to their children.

We have created this guide to help you process your parents' divorce and understand what is happening.

FEELINGS & EMOTIONS

During and after the divorce, you may feel a number of emotions:



LONELINESS



FEAR



ANGER



RELIEF



ANXIETY



SADNESS



SHOCK



GUILT



EMBARRASSMENT

Every single one of these feelings are totally natural, and you should not try and hide any of them from your parents. It is normal to be sad - this is a huge moment in your life and it might be a scary and confusing time for you.

You may also feel guilt, like you are somehow the cause of the split. It is crucial that you know this is not the case and your parents' break up is not because of you. People get divorced because of problems in their relationship.

It is not unusual to feel mixed emotions. No matter how you feel, it is important to know you are not alone - there are many teenagers in a similar situation to you across the UK.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS

You may be unsure about how to approach your parents as it might be difficult to know how they are feeling about the situation too. It might be hard to judge your approach, but there are a number of ways you can make the situation easier for yourself:

Talk to your parents about any concerns you may have. No matter what the situation is in their marriage, they are still your parents and they still love you. They should be there for you and ready to help you. If for some reason you feel you can't talk to them, you can talk to someone like a teacher or adult you trust.

If possible, try and keep busy. Spend time with your friends or doing things you enjoy doing:



Playing sports, video games, anything that will keep your mind busy and help you focus on more positive activities.

It may not feel like it straight away, but it can be possible to view the divorce positively. If your parents were unhappy in their marriage, then separating may make them happier in the long term.

Divorce is an incredibly tough situation for a teenager to go through, and once you have come through it, you will find yourself being a stronger person because of the experience

HONESTY

Being honest with your parents about how you're feeling is the best way to get your message across, it is important they know how you feel. Talk to them about your feelings openly, but try to avoid blame or insults where possible.

ASK QUESTIONS

If it helps, why not think about the questions you need to ask your parents in advance. Write them down if you need to. Although honesty is important and encouraged, try not to ask questions regarding any issues between your parents: Try to focus on the key questions regarding your situation.

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY?

Of course, it is completely understandable that you might not know where to start when it comes to speaking to your parents. If, for example, you are visiting a parent in their new home, or one parent introduces you to a new partner, you may feel awkward or unsure of how to act or talk about it. A tactic worth trying is to speak to them about your life in general, rather than divorce issues. What you've been up to, how school has been, what your plans are for the week. This is a good way of easing back in to conversations - not every talk needs to discuss matters relating to your parents' divorce.

If speaking to them face to face sounds too awkward, you can always try texting, emailing or a phone call instead.

YOUR PARENTS SHOULD NOT...

BADMOUTH EACH OTHER

Whatever issues your parents have with each other, they should not share them with you. The divorce was not because of you, and therefore both parents have a responsibility to ensure they do not involve you in their arguments or badmouth each other to you.

BRIBE YOU –

WITH GIFTS OR PRESENTS TO TAKE THEIR SIDE/BE LOYAL TO THEM

Your parents should not be trying to buy your favour or affections with gifts or money. Your parents may buy you things after the divorce to make you feel better about the situation, but gifts should not be bought to influence you or persuade you in situations regarding your parents separation.





ASK YOU TO TAKE SIDES

Your parents should not ask you to take sides. It is understandable that both parents may be finding the situation difficult but, to involve you in their matters or to try and turn you against the other parent is not ok. If you find yourself in this situation, it is recommended you let them know you do not want to be involved.

ASK TO YOU SEND MESSAGES TO THE OTHER PARENTS OR ASK YOU TO FIND OUT INFORMATION FOR THEM

E.G. IS YOUR DAD NOW DATING SOMEONE? TELL YOUR MUM I'M UNHAPPY SHE TURNED UP LATE TO THE VISITATION.

You are not a spy for your parents. It is important that your mum or dad do not ask you to find out information or pass messages to the other parent. This can put you in a difficult position - talk to the parent and let them know that you don't feel comfortable with this.



DISCUSS THE RELATIONSHIP ISSUES IN DETAIL LIKE A FRIEND AND BURDEN YOU WITH THIS INFORMATION

Whether a divorce is bitter and drawn out, or your parents split up but remain friends, sometimes they might need support too. However, ideally your mum or dad should not be relying on you for support or guidance even if you are great friends. This can often put pressure on you unnecessarily to say the right thing or be there for them. There are many places adults can go to seek help and advice if their relationship breaks down.



BE CONTROLLING

E.G. TELL YOU NOT TO SEE THE OTHER PARENT, OR CANCEL VISITS TO TRY AND PUNISH THE OTHER PARENT

As a teenager, how you interact and keep in contact with your parents is up to you. One parent should not tell you that they don't want you to see or talk the other parent, equally they should not cancel scheduled visits to cause upset to the other parent. It is important they do not let their issues get in the way of your relationship with the other parent.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If you feel that you can't talk to your parents about your situation, then there are other people who will be able to listen to you and help you through any concerns or issues you are having.

TRUSTED ADULT

Another family member, a favourite teacher or an adult that you trust are all good people to go to. Somebody who isn't part of your family or knows your family well will be able to give a fresh, unbiased perspective.

GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR

You can also visit a guidance counsellor. Your school may have one who you can visit during the day, or you can search for registered counsellors online, or ask your GP to recommend one to you.



ONLINE & HELPLINES

You can find lots of information and guides to help you online or you can call a dedicated helpline for free, confidential advice. For example, Childline counsellors are available 24 hours a day to talk confidentially to anyone under the age of 19 - by phone, email or through online chat.





**FACTS
ABOUT
DIVORCE**

**ACCORDING TO THE
MOST RECENT STATS,**

117,558

**COUPLES DIVORCED
IN THE UK IN 2013**



48%

**OF COUPLES DIVORCING IN 2013 HAD AT LEAST
ONE CHILD AGED UNDER 16 LIVING IN THE FAMILY.**

WHO DO I LIVE WITH?

If you are under 18, then your parents will agree on who you live with. In any decision that is made, the happiness and best interests of the children are a primary consideration. They will try and come to an agreement between themselves, but if they cannot do so then they will need to go to court. The judge will take your wishes into consideration, and decide what is best for you.

WILL I HAVE TO CHANGE SCHOOL?

You may have to change school if your parents agree that you will live with the parent that has moved away. However, if neither of your parents has moved particularly far, then you will be able to stay at your current school.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT ME?

If your parents are getting divorced, certain aspects of your life are likely to change, some in more significant ways than others.

WILL I BE SEPARATED FROM MY SIBLINGS?

Usually, your parents and the courts will do their best to keep you and your siblings together in any custody agreement. However, there are certain situations where splitting the siblings up may be the best course of action. For example, if one child has a good relationship with one parent but a bad relationship with the other, it may be wise to have that child live with the parent they have a good relationship with, and this may not be the same parent that their siblings live with.

STORIES FROM TEENAGERS

LUKE, 16

"When my parents told me they were separating, I felt very anxious and worried about what the future would hold. I knew my parents had been having relationship problems previously, but they had seemed much happier in recent months so their announcement came as a shock to me.

The proceedings took a while to be finalised, but they officially divorced last month. I could recognise my parents were not happy with each other during the divorce process, my mum seemed stressed, and my dad often refused to communicate with her. At my birthday, everyone tried to act like normal but I could tell there was an atmosphere.

At first, I didn't feel like talking, I just wanted to stay in my room. The thought of moving out of our family house, potentially having to move to another college and leaving my friends played on my mind for a long time. I've always had a great relationship with my parents, but I just didn't know what to say or how to approach them.

Several months later, I asked to speak to our guidance counsellor at college to get some advice. After a number of sessions I felt relieved to have spoken to someone about how I was feeling. They advised me to keep a journal of my thoughts and feelings which helped me manage my emotions.

Since the divorce, things have changed. I have moved in to a new house with my mum, although luckily I got to stay at the same college and local football team. I mainly see my dad at the weekends, but I always feel like we spend quality time together when we do meet up. I know it is going to take time for things to settle down and to adapt to the changes, but things are getting better and I'm feeling more positive about the future."



SARAH, 17

"When my parents got divorced, there wasn't really a big chat where we sat down and they told me they were getting divorced. It just sort of happened. The situation was a little unusual because my parents still lived in the same house - my mum in the basement and my dad upstairs. It was a financial decision.

I found it embarrassing and difficult to explain to my friends when they came over as it was such an unusual situation.

At first, I was really sad that my parents were getting divorced. Angry, even. But then I thought about how much they argued with each other and how they were unhappy because of these arguments. Now they are divorced and with other people, they don't argue anymore and they are much happier apart, which is good. Even better I still have a great relationship with both of them."



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