

Child Impact is a 4 hour program designed to provide parents with information that will help to support children during the process of divorce or custody changes and minimize the impact of divorce on the children. We encourage you to keep an open mind and participate actively in the program.

Divorce and custody proceedings create extremely stressful times for most parents, when even the best parenting skills can be compromised. In the midst of dealing with intense personal issues, parents are sometimes understandably unaware of their children's needs or unable to keep their children's well being a priority.

We know that parents love their children and want what is best for them – this program offers insight into divorce and custody issues from the children's perspective and information to help parents navigate the transition to successful co-parent.

In addition to the knowledge you will gain from your participation in the program, we have created supplemental material that we hope you will find helpful as you work through the process. We encourage you to keep the information sheets in this folder handy to reference as new issues arise. We have also included a number of additional resources including suggested reading lists and information about local programs and services should you find them necessary.

Getting through the emotional upheaval following divorce can be one of the most difficult challenges in the healing process. Both children and adults go through a grieving process that is similar to our reaction to the death of a loved one. Children and adults do not feel the loss in exactly the same way, and each person may experience loss differently, however, the process often follows a similar path.

Grieving takes a great deal of emotional energy, which may cause children to feel anxious and tired. Less energy is available for the day to day tasks such as school activities, friends and extra curricular activities. Your child needs parents who understand the grieving process and allows them the freedom to mourn the losses they are facing. Each stage needs the support and nurturing from those who care. Children who get stuck in the grief process may experience delays in emotional development. When acceptance is reached, it does not mean that the child likes what has happened, but rather accepts it as reality.

Parents are also mourning the losses associated with the break up of a relationship. You will need to give yourself permission to mourn too. You will also need the support from those who care.

The stages of the grieving process were first described by

Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. These stages and how your child may experience them are summarized below.

STAGE	How You May See it With Your Child
SHOCK AND DENIAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Disbelief: "this can't be happening to me"— Lying about the divorce— Problems with sleep and appetite— Difficulty paying attention and with memory
ANGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Projecting anger onto others— Blaming one or the other parent— Temper outbursts related to small stresses
BARGAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Feeling of insecurity that results in schemes to get parents back together. "If I do this (get all A's, go to bed at X, etc...) can we all get back together"
SADNESS/DESPAIR (AND DEPRESSION)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Exhibiting sadness, tears with clinging behavior and increased dependency, tears come easily— Slowly resigning to the reality of divorce
ACCEPTANCE (GROWTH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">— Quietness, while learning to accept the loss of a two parent home— Talking more openly about it— Renewed energy and interest in activities that may have been neglected

How Parents Can Help

Parents hear and see the signs of grief or discomfort in their children, but often indicate that it is hard to tell exactly what the child is feeling and harder to know what to say that will help.

It is important to stress that conflict between co-parents makes the child's emotional adjustment to the changes more difficult. **The more that you can do to minimize the conflict between you and your co-parent will be better for your child.**

Child therapists tell us that we can recognize the feelings of our children if we pay attention and offer some clear simple responses that may help. Some of the most common feelings expressed by children and responses that help are highlighted below.

FEELING	What You Can Say
Feelings of helplessness, and fear of the unknown	<p>Ask questions such as "Is there anything worrying you right now?". Offer reassurances that they can share any feelings or worries that they have. Tell them you care about how they are feeling and that you want to help.</p> <p>Once they begin to open up and express feelings, listen with a true desire to understand. One of the most important things a parent can do is express empathy. Children need to know their feelings are important and valid. By demonstrating that you care about their feelings, you are validating them as a person.</p>
Loss of predictability and routine, and therefore a loss of security. Children feel more secure when they can count on routine in their lives.	<p>Acknowledge the changes that the family is undergoing. Then emphasize the things that the child can rely on. Use a planning calendar for your child's custody arrangement, share it with your co-parent and make sure your child knows about it.</p> <p>Divorce always brings changes and with changes come a time of transition. Children will adjust to the changes but recognize that there will be a decrease in feelings of security as they move through the transition.</p>
Some children feel a sense of rejection from the parent who left the home.	<p>Offer continual reassurance that the child is loved by both parents. Match this with behaviors that demonstrate this message: Always arrive on time for a scheduled visit, plan special activities that provide an opportunity for quality interaction with your children.</p>

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.

Some of the common reactions based on age are highlighted below:

AGE	REACTIONS	COMMENTS
INFANTS & TODDLERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Loss of developmental accomplishments and regression (such as using the bottle again) — Becoming clingy with increased separation issues — Loss of pleasure in exploring their surroundings and generally withdrawing — Biting, hitting, head banging, and throwing toys from increased levels of frustration and anger 	<p><i>Young children depend on parents for basic care and emotional stability. Factors that increase confusion and anxiety include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — <i>Big changes in the daily routine</i> — <i>The emotional distress of the parents</i> — <i>Conflict between the parents</i>
PRESCHOOLERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Toddler reactions above — Frequent crying — Temper tantrums — Eating less or eating more — Becoming withdrawn 	<p><i>Preschoolers often believe that their misbehavior is responsible for the divorce. They may experience increased confusion and guilt.</i></p>
EARLY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (AGES 6-8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Preoccupation with guilt, sadness and insecurity — Quick to cry, or act cranky — Difficulty concentrating — Physical complaints like stomach ache, headache etc. — Attempts to reunite the parents – often by creating problems that require parents to be together — Taking on a caretaker role for a parent 	<p><i>Family is important for security safety and self esteem. Children of this age are often aware of the conflict prior to divorce and may feel caught in the middle in an emotional tug of war. They may tell each parent what they think they want to hear.</i></p>
9-12 YEAR-OLDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Expression of intense anger – verbal and physical attacks against parents and friends — Lying, stealing and other rebellious behavior — Refusing to attend school and/or poor school performance — Physical complaints — Denial of feelings — Assuming an adult role 	<p><i>Nine to twelve-year-olds are very aware of their surroundings. They may eavesdrop to learn more about "what is really going on" and will draw their own conclusions about what they believe. They may side with one parent and are very concerned about the impact on their relationships with friends. This age group is easily embarrassed and may pretend to be cool.</i></p>
ADOLESCENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Withdrawal — Angry and rebellious behavior — Physical complaints — Use of drugs and alcohol — Becoming sexually active — Poor school performance — Showing strong desire for parents to reunite 	<p><i>Teenagers are very aware of their physical growth, sexuality and independence. They continue to need parents for support.</i></p>

How Parents Can Help

Parents can help their children feel safe and secure, regardless of their age, by doing a number of simple things:

- Reassure your children that they will be taken care of, that they are loved and that the divorce is not their fault
- Minimize change – as much as possible maintain the same residence, school, church and childcare
- Help your child maintain contact with other family members and friends
- Prepare your child for changes before they happen
- Acknowledge your child's anger
- Allow your child to love both parents, and arrange for one on one time with each parent. With very young children, limit the amount of time they are separated from the primary caregiver
- Prior to parent child separations, let the child know that the parent will return. (Avoid sneaking away)
- Establish routines and responsibilities in both households and maintain rules and limits
- Make sure daily routines are as consistent as possible
- Provide clear and accurate information about the divorce without sharing intimate details
- Allow your child to take familiar objects with them
- Allow your child to express fears, concerns and complaints to each parent
- Encourage open and honest communication
- Inform the school of the family circumstances

There are also some things you should avoid:

- Parental hostility in front of the children
- Making your child choose one parent over the other
- Criticizing the other parent in front of your children
- Sharing too much information
- Putting your child in an adult role by telling them they are "the man of the house or – I'm counting on you to help"
- Asking your child questions about the other parent or making them relay messages
- Overindulging your children
- Getting involved in another relationship too soon
- Relying on your child for emotional support

Parenting during divorce is particularly challenging because emotions are high and our co-parent may be our opponent in court. The temptation to try to control our child and win them away from the influence of our co-parent may be real but it can cause great harm.

What is Parental Conflict?

Parental conflict is any action that places the child between parents or forces the child to choose one parent over the other. Parental conflict can be anything from hostile body language, sarcasm, or unfriendly tone of voice to threats of violence, verbal attacks or physical violence.

How does it affect my child?

When children feel caught in the middle or forced to choose between parents they pay a great price in terms of increased fears, anxiety and stress. Parental conflict changes the nature of the parent child relationship, causes strain on a child's development and impacts self esteem.

Children base their identity on how they perceive both parents. Children's beliefs about themselves are developed in many ways with two of the stronger factors being their belief of who their mother and father are. How children feel about themselves affects almost every aspect of their lives including school, play and relationships. When children are exposed to intense conflict and feuding between parents, the people who represent security in their lives, self esteem is effected negatively.

How do I contribute to parental conflict?

Although parents would not consciously hurt their children, there are some common behaviors that parents may do to create conflict. Awareness of some of common pitfalls may help parents to avoid them:

Cutting the other parent out of our child's life.

This includes not letting the child talk about their other parent, removing or cutting out photos of the other

parent, packing away or throwing away mementos in the child's room, not relaying messages to the child from the other parent, and ignoring the other parent at social functions. Another form of cutting the parent out is to not inform them of school and sports events.

Attacking the other co-parent.

Some parents attempt to win the child's love by attacking the character of the other parent, or a parent may remain hurt and angry at the co-parent and forget that these feelings should stay among adults. Either way, putting down the other parent is damaging to children. Criticizing the co-parent's family is another form of attacking the other co-parent, as is degrading the parents career choice.

Placing the child in the middle of adult issues.

Children should not be involved in the discussion of money, custody or other parent decisions in the process. Bringing children into custody and support issues by making statements like "If I got more support perhaps we could get you the shoes you wanted" is harmful, as is using your child as a messenger for business that should be discussed between adults, including support payments and schedule issues.

Other serious pitfalls include exaggerating the other parent's flaws, withdrawing love unless your child gives up the co-parent, and undermining your child's understanding of their time with the co-parent by suggesting that the way they are cared for by the other parent is wrong.

In its most serious form these actions are all forms of parental alienation.

So What Can I Do?

In every divorce there is often some level of conflict. But an attitude of cooperation is important when it comes to the children. A child needs a relationship with both parents and there are some actions that can support a spirit of cooperation and minimize the impact of divorce and custody issues for children:

Keep children out of the litigation

Do not talk about the case in front of the children or with them by allowing them to read court documents or by trying to enlist the child as a witness on your behalf. Let children know that these matters are for the parents to work out. Do not bring the children to court hearings.

Let children know that both parents love them very much and they are not the cause of the problems between the parents.

Do not involve the children in support issues.

Never make remarks about support issues to the children, make the children carry the support check, or pay the support check at the time of visit.

Allow children access to your co-parent and privacy in conversation with them.

Do not use the answering machine as a means of preventing the other parent from reaching the child.

Be considerate of your co-parent.

Place calls to your co-parent at a reasonable time that will not interrupt dinner or bed time routines. Limit the call to a few minutes and limit the number of calls. Let the other parent know about any changes in address, telephone number or employment. Send and return all appropriate clothing, toys and supplies for the child's visit. Always give the child gifts and cards sent by the other parent or relatives unless the court has authorized you to refuse or monitor them.

Use the model of a business relationship when interacting with your co-parent.

Pay child support regularly and on time.

Pay by wage assignment or arrange for direct deposit on a specified day. Do not write messages on the check, stop payment or bounce support checks. If a problem arises with support checks let the other party know immediately and try to work it out.

Encourage a positive relationship between the child and both parents.

Form a united front about rules and punishments.

Be consistent, supportive and exchange information with the other parent. If possible agree to punishments ahead of time. Don't use your co-parent as part of that punishment unless both parents agree to that. Do not undermine the authority of the other parent by telling the child that the rules in one parents house are stupid and they don't have to follow it at your house. Two sets of rules and two sets of parenting styles are confusing to a child. Try to set uniform rules and follow them.

Focus on your child.

While your child is with you focus on their needs and keep your own problems to yourself. If you need help dealing with your own feelings get help. Spend quality time with your children regularly and faithfully. Whatever your arrangement, make the most of your time together.

Treat your co-parent as you would want to be treated.

New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

NH Statewide Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-277-5570

NH Statewide Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-866-644-3574

www.nhcadsv.org

Mediation — An Alternative to the Courts

The court litigation process for divorce, child custody and visitation issues is often bitter, expensive and does not always result in the best order for the children or the parents. Parents who are willing to try and work out their issues together may benefit from an alternative dispute resolution process known as Mediation.

What is Mediation?

Mediation is an informal process where both parties meet with a trained, neutral third party mediator to identify issues, come up with solutions and resolve issues by agreement. Mediation is a problem-solving process that gives parents the chance to control the decisions that will affect their future. A mediator helps to identify the points where there is agreement and then works with the participants to create practical, informed solutions.

The mediator does not decide what is best for the co-parents or the children, but rather assists co-parents to make those decisions through an agreement. Mediation occurs outside the courtroom setting in a less stressful and friendlier atmosphere and is often quicker and easier on the participants – especially the kids.

Solutions worked out through mediation have the best chance of working in the long run since the parties themselves have come to an agreement. It is possible to mediate some issues in a case and reserve other more difficult issues for the court to decide.

How is it different than using the court?

Mediation is different from litigation in almost every respect. In litigation, lawyers speak on behalf of the parties involved. In mediation, lawyers act as advisors, but the parties speak on their own behalf so that the agreement reflects their personal needs and perspectives.

Mediation is often less expensive than court litigation since the parties are sharing in the cost of the mediator rather than paying individual attorneys to appear in court and obtain a court ordered solution.

Unlike traditional divorce proceedings, mediation takes the approach that individuals who were once able to organize their lives together can also arrange to live them apart. It's a different way of viewing divorce, and one with many advantages.

Who should use Mediation?

Mediation is most successful when both parties are willing to be flexible and work out a solution that is best for themselves and their children. Mediation is not appropriate when the parties have a history of domestic violence or if there is a large difference in terms of power and control in the relationship.

How do I find a Mediator?

Mediators are regulated in many states including New Hampshire. Mediators must go through comprehensive training and then obtain extensive mediation experience under the supervision of a trained mediator. The names of NH certified mediators are included in your material. Mediators can also be found in the Yellow Pages under Mediation Service. Your attorney or the courts may also have a list of mediators available in your area.

Additional Resources:

www.courts.state.nh.us/adrp/mediation.htm

www.courts.state.nh.us/fdpp/mediation.htm

www.nh.gov/marital/mediators.htm

SUGGESTED WEBSITES FOR PARENTS

CO-PARENTING

<http://centerforparentingeducation.org/> – **Center for Parenting Education** – Building upon families' strengths and helping parents create a home environment where children can become caring, confident, and responsible.

www.childrenanddivorce.com – **Children and Divorce** – A resource site for parents, kids and professionals addressing divorce-related issues.

<http://www.helpguide.org/home-pages/family-divorce.htm> – **Help Guide** – Guide for improving your mental and emotional health

<https://nationalparentsorganization.org/> – **National Parents Organization** – Preserving the bond between parents and children.

www.parents.com – **Parents Magazine**. Available in Spanish <http://serpadres.com/>

www.listen2kids.net – **Partners In Parenting** – Support and educational resources for children, parents, counselors, and professionals dealing with siblings of Autism, divorce, illness, and grief and loss.

www.proudtoparent.org – **Proud To Parent** – A free, confidential, and eye-opening website for parents never married to each other. Available in Spanish.

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/divorce> – **Sesame Street** – Little children, big challenges: Divorce. Available in Spanish <http://www.plazasesamo.com/>

www.emeryondivorce.com – **The Truth About Children and Divorce** by Robert E. Emery, PhD.

www.uptoparents.org – **Up To Parents** – A free, confidential, and interactive website for divorcing and divorced parents. Available in Spanish.

COURT / LEGAL

<https://www.nhbar.org/lawyer-referral/> – **NH Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service**

<https://www.nhbar.org/for-the-public/free-legal-services.asp#probono> – **NH Bar Association Pro Bono Program**

<http://www.courts.state.nh.us/> – **NH Judicial Branch**

<http://www.nhlegalaid.org/> – **NH Legal Aid** – Legal information, referrals, and pro se assistance.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

<http://www.nhcadsv.org/index.cfm> – **NH Coalition for Domestic Violence** – Helping victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and stalking.

<http://www.aardvarc.org/dv/states/nhdv.shtml> – **NH Domestic Violence Resources** – An abuse, rape, and domestic violence aid and resource collection.

CO-PARENTING

Families Apart: Ten Keys to Successful Co-Parenting by Melinda Blau, 1995

Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In by Roger Fisher and William L. Ury, 2011

Getting Together: Building Relationships As We Negotiate by Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, 1989

Keeping Kids Out Of The Middle: Child-Centered Parenting in the Midst of Conflict, Separation, and Divorce by Benjamin D. Garber, PhD, 2008

Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for Your Child by Isolina Ricci PhD, 1997 (*Children's version also on list*)

Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg, 2003

Parents are Forever: A Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming Successful Co-parents after Divorce by Shirley Thomas PhD, 2004

Putting Kids First: Walking Away From A Marriage Without Walking Over The Kids by Michael L. Oddenino, 1996

The Co-Parenting Manifesto: Practical Tools to Lower Stress & Improve Cooperation by Jon C Peters, MSW, 2012

Two Happy Homes: A Working Guide for Parents and Stepparents after Divorce and Remarriage by Shirley Thomas PhD, 2005

TEENAGE (AGES: 13 – 18)

It's Not the End of the World by Judy Blume, 2014

The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger, 2007

PRETEEN (AGES: 9 – 12)

Divorce is Not the End of the World: Zoe's and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids by Zoe Stern and Evan Stern, 2008

Don't Make Me Smile by Barbara Park, 2002

It's Not the End of the World by Judy Blume, 2014

Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids: Feeling at Home in One Home or Two by Isolina Ricci PhD, 2006 (*Adult version also on list*)

My Parents are Divorced Too: A Book for Kids by Kids by Melanie Ford, Steven Ford, Annie Ford, and Jann Blackstone-Ford, 2006

The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger, 2007

What Can I Do? A Book for Children of Divorce by Danielle Lowry, 2002

What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids by Kent Winchester and Roberta Beyer, 2001

When Mom and Dad Separate: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief from Divorce by Marge Heegaard, 1996

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (AGES: 4 – 8)

Amber Brown is Green with Envy by Paula Danziger, 2014

Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families by Marc Brown and Laurie Krasny Brown, 1988

I Don't Want to Talk About It by Jeanie Franz Ransom, 2000

It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear: A Read Together Book for Parents and Young Children During Divorce by Vicki Lansky, 1998

Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids: Feeling at Home in One Home or Two by Isolina Ricci PhD, 2006 (*Adult version also on list*)

Was it the Chocolate Pudding?: A Story for Little Kids about Divorce by Sandra Levins and Bryan Langdo, 2005