

Children of Divorce Rx.

“Prescription for Keeping Children on Track thru Divorce”

Here is some information you will find very helpful.

Children of Divorce

Divorce is a common reality for adults and children. Currently almost half of first marriages end in divorce and a greater proportion of subsequent marriages end the same way. This means that there are inevitably thousands of *children of divorce*. Because of clinical nature of statistics and ever-present media debates, it is easy to forget the struggle and pain represented by these figures. It has been suggested that about one third of the children of divorce will *not* experience significant adverse effects, while another third will have some *short-term* problems, with the remainder experiencing problems throughout their *lifespan*.

Divorce is not merely something that affects a husband and wife, as the majority of divorces occur in families with children. Divorce is not a single event but a process of change that extends over a prolonged period of time. Divorce brings with it an extended period of psychological and social disequilibrium that adults and children often find exceedingly stressful. Divorce is only one in a series of transitions and reorganisations that follow separation and marital dissolution.

The following are some suggestions that may be helpful when supporting children of divorce. These recommendations could be shared with family members and educators so that they may be used when interacting with this ever-growing population.

These ideas are not meant to be exhaustive, but are offered as starting points for discussion and intervention within a context of a caring relationship with children:

- (a) explain the divorce simply and openly;
- (b) avoid attributing blame and guilt for the divorce;
- (c) make it clear it is not the child who is being divorced;
- (d) eliminate competition for the child's love and attention;
- (e) let the child feel safe to express hurt and angry feelings;
- (f) assure the child that they are not responsible for the divorce;
- (g) give the child information about changes that may occur in their life;
- (h) encourage the child to talk about feelings, thoughts, and reactions;
- (i) be flexible with regard to daily arrangements;
- (j) encourage the child to keep in contact with friends and family;
- (k) be honest about the difficulties associated with readjustment;
- (l) help the child to problem-solve their difficulties;
- (m) support the child in the expression of their needs;
- (n) explain it is beyond their ability to reunite the parents;
- (o) reassure the child they will always be part of a family;
- (p) enhance trust via a positive relationship with the child;
- (q) develop self-esteem by setting challenging yet attainable tasks;
- (r) teach child positive self-talk techniques;

- (s) accept child's temperamental idiosyncrasies;
- (t) encourage the child to develop hobbies and interests;
- (u) encourage the child to reach out to others;
- (v) convey a sense of caring;
- (w) encourage and reward the child for helpfulness;
- (x) model a conviction that life makes sense;
- (y) structure experiences that challenge; and
- (z) provide meaning and value to the child's life.

Divorced parents need to be clear, consistent and generous in offering love and affection to their children, while simultaneously setting firm boundaries and expectations. Parents need to also draw clear boundaries for any new and ex-relationships. It is within these parameters that children can feel secure and develop greater optimism for the future. Children are likely to develop psychological hardiness if the demands upon them are moderate, if their parents support their efforts to perform new responsibilities, and if family members hold a positive view of divorce-related changes, given that children often like to maintain regular contact with both parents.

With children of divorce an escalating phenomenon, the resultant issues in homes and schools need to be addressed via quality interventions. As parents face the challenges on the home-front, well-planned and developmentally appropriate strategies should be focused on to help with any adjustment difficulties for the ever-increasing and potentially vulnerable population of the children of divorce. Professionals can aid you in this process too.

© 2013 Dr. John Barletta MAPS
Clinical Psychologist
Level 1, Suite 2
3 Days Rd, Grange 4051
☎ 3356 4400
john@johnbarletta.com
www.johnbarletta.com