

# How Divorce Affects Children



*Infancy through  
Pre-School*



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**Friend of the Court**

***“For Our Children”***

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Adults often see divorce as relief - the best way to end a bad relationship. For most children, divorce is confusion, loneliness, anger, and unanswered questions. This pamphlet is designed to make you aware of some of the ways divorce may affect your child and to offer suggestions as to what you can do to help him/her through this difficult period.

### **INFANCY THROUGH PRE-SCHOOL**

These children live in a small world mostly made up of parents and family. They have not had many experiences. They react to things in an emotional way and cannot understand the divorce on an intellectual level. Divorce is confusing and these children may be afraid that they will be abandoned or have nowhere to live. They cry, cling, and become demanding. They may blame themselves for the divorce and feel guilty.

### **COMMON REACTIONS**

Trouble sleeping; afraid to leave parents; clinging; crying; slowing down in learning new skills.

### **HOW CAN YOU HELP?**

#### **CHILDREN NEED PREDICTABILITY**

Maintain a regular routine. Maintain a smooth and healthy environment. Continue frequent and regular contact with both parents.

#### **CHILDREN NEED RELATIONSHIPS WITH BOTH PARENTS**

Stress the good points about the other parent. Allow children to express their love for the other parent and talk about their experiences with the other parent. Encourage the other parent's involvement in the children's activities.

#### **KEEP CHILDREN OUT OF THE MIDDLE**

Talk directly to the other parent about child-related information. Do not ask the child what goes on in the other parent's home. Do not argue in front of the children. Don't expect or encourage children to take sides. Don't withhold the children from the other parent or refuse to pay the child support.

### **COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT**

Parents should tell children about the divorce together if possible. Children need to know how they will be affected by the divorce. Reassure them that they are not to blame. Answer questions honestly while avoiding unnecessary details. Discuss divorce related issues in terms children can understand. Encourage discussion regarding their feelings and problems. Express love and commitment to the children to help them feel secure. Do not allow past conflicts to interfere with present decisions regarding the children.

Divorce affects children. If parents remain cooperative, honest, and loving, the effects will be minimal. Children can successfully deal with divorce, but they need good role models. Parents are best able to help children deal with divorce successfully.