



## Children's Health

# Divorce

### HOW TO HELP CHILDREN COPE

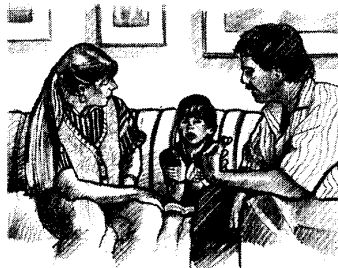
#### **THE DIVORCE DILEMMA**

The tension has become unbearable. Nothing works. You and your spouse have both had it and one of you moves out. The end. But not really.

The relationships you each have with your children still needs attention and nurturing. Most children eventually adjust to divorce in the family. However, in some families, leftover angry feelings can make recovery slow or difficult. Communication is an important tool to help your children cope.

#### **TELL CHILDREN THE TRUTH**

Be honest with your children. While the impulse may be to put off telling the children about the divorce to



spare their feelings, the reality is that they may already know something's going on. The truth is easier to take than what their imaginations may dream up.

Whenever possible, give them time to adjust to the separation before it happens. Answer all your children's questions honestly, without lies or false promises.

#### **RESOLVE CRITICAL ISSUES FIRST**

Try to have the critical family issues resolved before telling your children about the impending separation and divorce. Although it can be very difficult, try to have custody, visitation and financial matters discussed and tentatively arranged before telling your children. Being able to answer their questions about how the separation and divorce will affect their lives is very important and will help make the adjustment easier.

#### **REASSURE YOUR CHILDREN**

Many children feel that they're somehow responsible for their parents' divorce. It's important to let them know that they're not to blame.

#### **ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO EXPRESS FEELINGS**

Be prepared for denial, anger, bargaining and depression. These are all normal stages for children to go through before they can accept the separation and divorce. Once it's accepted, they'll still feel remorse or wish things were different. Remember, you can't fix their feelings, but you can listen to them and accept them.

#### **KEEP THEIR BEST INTERESTS IN MIND**

Children suffer the most during bitter divorces. Using children as bargaining tools or informants hurts them more than it may help you. Always keep the best interests of your children in mind.

#### **STAY INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILDREN'S LIVES**

Even if you're not the custodial parent, it's important to stay involved and in touch with your children. Explain that they won't be permanently separated from you or the other parent. Reassure them that they can still see you, only in a different manner.

#### **REMEMBER YOUR NEEDS**

To be a good parent, you need to be a healthy person. Take care of yourself so you're able to take care of your children.

Make sure you're able to spend some quality time on yourself, as well as with your children.

#### **SEEK SUPPORT**

Support groups for children of divorce are available in many areas.

Counseling is also available on an individual or group basis. Many schools also offer counseling for students.

#### **CHILDREN AND REMARRIAGE**

Life does go on after divorce, and for some families that means remarriage and blended families. This is a whole new adjustment period. It may take as many as five years before the new family unit is comfortable for all.

So expect some bumpy roads. It's important to accept the stepchildren or stepparents just as they are. Build a relationship around shared interests or skills and allow relationships to grow on their own. Make sure each family member receives regular attention.