



Know! How to Keep Kids in Focus If Divorce Occurs

As the holiday season came to a close, a new, far less joyful season began—the divorce season. January is known as a time of new beginnings; wiping the slate clean and starting fresh. For many married couples, that unfortunately means separation and divorce. In fact, January sees such a spike in marriages being ended that it is recognized as National Child-Centered Divorce Awareness Month.

Why the child-centered focus? Because as painful as separation and divorce are for the couple going through it, they can be devastating and disastrous for the children involved. National Child-Centered Divorce Awareness Month was created to alert parents about the potential effects of divorce on children, and to help protect young people's emotional, psychological, and physical well-being.

To be clear, this month is not meant to encourage unhappy couples to remain together for the sake of the children. For some families, especially those whose home is filled with constant anger and turmoil, divorce can actually bring about relief not only for the couple involved, but for the children as well. The awareness month is instead about recognizing the complexities of divorce on all family members and taking into account the needs and feelings of the children, as a separating couple makes decisions along the way.

Keep Teens in Mind

Teens who witness a painful and ugly divorce between their parents, may become emotionally distraught and turn to unhealthy coping strategies like drinking, smoking, and self-harming (cutting

for example). This is often an attempt to deal with or escape their overwhelming feelings. Statistics show that teenagers whose parents get divorced are four times more likely to misuse alcohol and drugs than those teens whose parents remain together. There are times in a child's life when they are at greater risk for alcohol and drug use. Parental divorce is one of those times. These children are also at greater risk for experiencing sleep problems, difficulties in school, having eating disorders, losing interest in social activities, and engaging in rebellious behaviors.

Child-Centered Divorce Network founder Rosalind Sedacca, CDC, says parents can help combat some of the negatives. She encourages parents to first put themselves in their children's shoes. Take into account that the world as they know it is gone. The foundation on which they've stood may feel as though it is crumbling beneath them.

The Six Points of Child-Centered Divorce

Sedacca says parents must confidently and consistently convey six essential points to children in the midst of divorce:

1. This is not your fault.
2. You are and will always remain safe.
3. Mom and Dad will always be your parents.
4. Mom and Dad will always love you.
5. This is about change, not about blame.
6. Things will work out okay.

Child experts also say that youth should be encouraged to talk openly and regularly about how they are feeling so as not to become overwhelmed with bottled up emotions. Children need to know they do not have to pick sides. And regardless of the circumstances that brought about the divorce, they are allowed and encouraged to love both parents.

It's also important for parents not to badmouth one another to your children. Be careful how much information you share with your children—your child should not be your confidant in this instance. And never use your child as a weapon against the other parent.

Most couples who begin the divorce process in January typically think about it long before the New Year, but they want to make it through the holidays first. If you and/or your spouse are thinking about, discussing, or are in the process of separating or divorcing, it is critically important to keep the split "child-centered." As painful and difficult as it may be, your child's health and well-being are at stake.

Sources

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- [Stonewater Adolescent Recovery Center: How Divorce Affects Your Teen's Substance Abuse. Dec. 2018.](#)
- [Dr. Vicki Panaccione, Better Parenting Institute: National Child-Centered Divorce Month. July 2010.](#)
- [Damon Verial, Healthfully.com: How Divorce Affects Teens Psychologically & Emotionally. June 2017.](#)

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