As of January 1st, 2016 some aspects of The Illinois Marriage and Dissolution of Marriage Act underwent changes. The current version of the Parenting Education Curriculum remains to be the most comprehensive program to assist parents and caregivers in adapting to the many issues related to divorce; however, some language within the curriculum has undergone revision due to the changes in the law.

- Handouts provided will indicate when language is not consistent with current terms.
- Instances where this notation is present represents a change in the language that is presented in the video.

Welcome

- Introduction and Instructions
- History and Purpose of Children First

Plan for Session 1

- Goals for program and session
- Handout
- Reminder
- (Pre-test)

Basic Needs of Children

- Acceptance
- Safety
- Freedom
- Structure
- Stable parenting
- Let kids be kids

Taking Care of Yourself
Meet Danice

- Separated 6 months ago, divorce pending
- Strong emotions
- Confused about her role
- Feels isolated
- Overwhelmed
- Uncertain about her future

Question for you

- In what ways can you identify with Danice?

Your well-being is important

- Coping styles
  - Problem-focused
  - Emotion-focused
  - Avoidant
- An avoidant style is not healthy

Your well-being is important

- Choose approach based on situation
- Focus on one stress at a time

How could you handle this problem?

- Which coping style might be most effective?

Manage the stress of divorce

- What is stressing you?
  - List all of your stressors
  - Identify the things you can control
  - Change one at a time
- Take breaks
- Learn to relax
Manage the stress of divorce

- Problem-solving steps
  - Relax and remain calm
  - Clearly define the problem
  - Create a list of possible solutions
  - Evaluate the possible solutions
  - Pick the best solution
  - Apply the solution. How did it work?

Develop a support network

- Keep supportive friendships
- Choose these friendships carefully
- Do not overburden your friends
- Do not rely on your children
- Seek professional help if needed

Take care of your health

- Have a well-balanced diet
- Exercise
- Get rest
- Try to keep a regular schedule
- Find healthy ways to release emotional tension
- Develop your sense of humor
- Avoid drugs and increasing use of alcohol

Quiz

Danice: 1 year later

- Danice is doing much better
  - Improved coping skills
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Structured way to solve problems
  - Supportive relationships
  - Takes care of her health
- Her children benefit from her well-being
## Infants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before divorce</th>
<th>Impact of divorce</th>
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<td>Difficult to comfort</td>
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## Toddlers

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<td>Build attachment and trust</td>
<td>Normal separation anxiety can be exaggerated; clingy</td>
<td>Tell the child where the absent parent is</td>
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<td>Develop a sense of self</td>
<td>Difficulty coping with longer term separation from primary caregiver</td>
<td>Keep a predictable schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language builds and matures; memory and imagination develop</td>
<td>May regress to an earlier behavior</td>
<td>Keep familiar items with them to provide consistency and comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentric</td>
<td>Ask repeatedly about the absence of the other parent</td>
<td>Keep other caregivers updated on changes and how to support your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can feel safe outside of primary caregiver’s home</td>
<td>Frequent changes in emotion</td>
<td>Help them express thoughts and feelings with words; reassure them of your love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Preschoolers

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<tr>
<th>Before divorce</th>
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<th>What you can do to help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can talk about their feelings and needs</td>
<td>Fear losing parental love and may feel abandoned</td>
<td>Spend extra time with your child (10-15 min.) before you plan to separate from them for a period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to control their emotions</td>
<td>Strongly affected by parent conflicts</td>
<td>Give your child permission to love and enjoy the other parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonder if they will still be loved if they oppose a parent’s will</td>
<td>May fantasize about their parents being together and may deny the divorce ever happened</td>
<td>Give firm, consistent, and sensitive messages about the divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn behaviors from adults</td>
<td>Can take on stress and tension from the parent</td>
<td>Consistent affection and boundaries. Learn to de-stress yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentric</td>
<td>Often fearful and sad; may appear emotionally needy</td>
<td>Help your child grieve; offer extra support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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## Early Elementary (6-9 years old)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can now have feelings of guilt and realize others have feelings</td>
<td>Can understand a schedule of alternating between homes</td>
<td>Minimize the amount of change to your child’s schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends and getting along with teachers</td>
<td>Possible withdrawing from social contacts.</td>
<td>Let your child maintain contact with friends and stay in the same activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use moral judgment; learning cause and effect, begin thinking of the future</td>
<td>Fear the loss of a parent’s love; have difficulty understanding people can be both good and bad</td>
<td>Offer regular contact with each parent; encourage your child to express thoughts and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult behaviors teach more than words</td>
<td>Sensitive to loyalty conflicts between parents; feel disloyal to one parent when they love other parent</td>
<td>Reassure your children that they did not cause the divorce; reinforce rules and give positive feedback; read books about divorce</td>
</tr>
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## Preteen (9 to 12 years old)

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<th>What you can do to help</th>
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<tr>
<td>Self-conscious</td>
<td>Demand an explanation of the divorce</td>
<td>Be honest. Explain the divorce in terms they understand and appropriate to their age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Become increasingly independent. May start to rebel.</td>
<td>May blame the parent they do not agree with for the divorce.</td>
<td>Reduce conflict between parents and avoid blaming one another</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give in to negative peer pressure</td>
<td>Increase in fights because of strong emotions; may feel abandoned and blame themselves</td>
<td>Be consistent with rules and discipline; offer positive feedback as a reward; keep consistent contact with child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can plan and meet goals</td>
<td>Feelings of anger, being cheated, hurt, and guilty</td>
<td>Include children in family decisions when possible</td>
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## Teenagers (13 to 17 years old)

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<th>What you can do to help</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Figuring out who they are in relation to peer and society rules</td>
<td>Understand the divorce process and separate themselves from their parents actions/reactions</td>
<td>Give permission for independence. Give them a say in the scheduling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin developing a sense of purpose, clarifying long-term plans and values</td>
<td>Capable of forming an independent opinion of where and with whom they want to live</td>
<td>Stay involved in their life. Avoid role reversal and don’t involve them in adult worries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking increased responsibility for what they do and who they are</td>
<td>Act as if divorce is not a big deal and they can handle it</td>
<td>Offer protection and love for who they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning intimacy, honesty, self-disclosure, and trust in relationships</td>
<td>May feel unsure about their own feelings of love, marriage, and families; may feel like they’ve grown up too quickly.</td>
<td>Provide closeness, concern, and fairness. Keep family routines and traditions. Don’t give extra permission out of parent guilt.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Discussing Difficult Topics with Children:

Marital Infidelity

While parents go through a divorce, children may be able to sense the increase in tension caused by the infidelity (Thorson, 2015). Children will react to the divorce, but unless the children ask about the infidelity, parents do not need to initiate discussion about the infidelity. For children 3rd grade and above, it may be appropriate to answer some questions that children have about the infidelity. For children below 3rd grade, details of the infidelity should generally not be discussed. Either of the parents could discuss the marital infidelity with the children, but it is most helpful if the adult who committed the infidelity speaks with the children. For example, research shows that when adults who went through a parental divorce as children were questioned about their experience, they remarked that they maintained a more positive relationship with the parent who committed the infidelity when the infidelity was discussed with them (Thorson, 2015).

Helpful Hints:

1. If the child asks about the infidelity, begin by asking what they know
   - A child may know more about what is going on than they appear to know.
   - A child will sometimes internalize emotions and feelings, choosing not to share them unless directly asked.
   - If a child does not want to talk about the topic, do not force them to talk right away. Give them time to open up at their own pace.

2. Leave out details
   - Revealing too many details about the situation may make your child feel like they are choosing sides.
   - Keep details at an age appropriate level (examples on next page).

3. Help them feel secure
   - Make sure the child knows that they are still loved by each of their parents.
   - Each child may show distress in different ways manners. Refer to the Child Development Charts (Slides 18 – 23).

4. Affirm there are no sides
   - Making a child choose sides could hurt the child’s relationship with both parents.
   - It is important to not break the relationship between children and their parents, as long as there is no concern for the child’s safety.

5. Rebuild Parent-Child Relationship
   - A child usually views his or her parents as a role model, and their view may become damaged due to the marital infidelity.
   - It is important to encourage the child to spend time with each parent in order to maintain a positive relationship with each of them.

## Age Appropriate Discussion on Infidelity

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Type of Information</th>
<th>Example of Inappropriate Communication</th>
<th>Example of Appropriate Communication</th>
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<tr>
<td>Below 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>Discussion on parental infidelity is inappropriate for this age group.</td>
<td>Giving any details as to the reason for the divorce. “Your Father is having an affair!”</td>
<td>“Your Mother and I are not getting along at this time and we are no longer able to stay married. But we both love you very much and that will not change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Grade to 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>Confirm that there was marital infidelity, but do not give details about the affair itself, or the person involved.</td>
<td>“Your Mother is having an affair with her secretary at work. She is a terrible parent and I cannot stand to be miserable and married to her any longer!”</td>
<td>“Your Father met someone who he is spending time with, like a married couple would do. But it is inappropriate to do that while we are still married. We are no longer able to stay married together, but we both love you very much and that will not change.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade to 12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
<td>Child may be able to handle more details, but continue to leave out anything about who, what, when, where, and why the affair is happening.</td>
<td>“Last week your Father was late coming home because he was having sex at the office with his secretary, Jane. He has been having sex with her for the past 7 months!”</td>
<td>“Your Mother is having an affair with someone from work and it is not okay to do that in a marriage. We are no longer happy together. We are getting a divorce, so that we can both find our own happiness. We both love you very much and that will not change.”</td>
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Substance Abuse

When a family member is having difficulties with drugs and alcohol abuse, it adds stress to the family environment. Children may not understand what is causing this increase in family tension. Unless the children ask about the substance abuse, parents do not need to initiate the discussion. When explaining more about substance abuse, older children will be able to handle more details about the issue, but younger children do not need details about the substance abuse. Throughout the conversation, the children need to know that they can freely and safely express their thoughts and feelings. Children do react to changes in the family environment and each child shows distress in different manners. Refer to the Child Development Charts (Slides 18 – 23) to show how different ages show their distress.

Helpful Hints:

1. Addiction is a disease
   - People who are addicted to substances need clinical help, just as if a child would need to go to the doctor if they were sick.
   - Substance abuse is a symptom of a greater problem that a person is going through. The family is not at fault for the addiction.
2. Give honest, but developmentally appropriate information
   - If a child asks a direct question, the parent should answer honestly, but please keep the response age appropriate or seek additional resources to help explain.
3. Keep discussions at an age appropriate level
   - Children usually do not need to be told the specific substance that their parent is abusing. It is more important that the child understands that his or her parent has an addiction.
   - When discussing a parent’s absence from the home, due to inpatient treatment, the communication should be age appropriate. For example:
     - Elementary school children may be told, “Your parent is going away for a while to get better.”
     - Middle school and high school children may be told, “Your parent is going to inpatient treatment to overcome their addiction.”
4. Affirm to the child that they are in a safe environment
   - Make sure that the child knows that they are loved and that they are safe.
   - Make sure that the child knows that they are not at fault for the parent’s substance abuse.
   - Help the child to freely express their thoughts and feelings in a safe manner during this time.
   - Seek additional resources for children to help them understand their parent’s substance abuse.
5. Additional Resources
   - National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA): www.nacoa.org
   - For children 11 years or older Alateen groups may be available: www.alateen.org
Social Media Guidelines

While going through a divorce, it is important to find a healthy way to discuss all the difficulties and challenges that you are going through. However, social media is not a healthy way to vent your frustrations and can harm your relationships with others. There are two main reasons you want to be careful of what you post: you want to foster a positive relationship with your ex-spouse for your child, and what you post could be used against you legally.

Helpful Hints:

1. Negative social media posts harm relationships
   - Posting negative remarks about your ex-spouse on social media can make you feel good in the short term, but can do unintentional harm in the long term.
   - It is important to find someone to talk to about the divorce. For example, a best friend or small number of close friends is best.

2. Social media posts can be used against you
   - Social media posts can be legally used as evidence during your divorce.
   - Courts can use social media documentation of large expenses, emotional instability, or unreasonable behavior. For example, posts about buying a car, badmouthing your ex-spouse, or posting photos from when you were intoxicated at a party, may be used against you in court.

3. Focus on what is best for your children
   - If you are friends with your children on social media, any negative posts about their other parent will be hurtful to your children.
   - These negative posts will only hinder your relationship with your child.

4. Do not stalk your ex-spouse on social media
   - This will probably cause more emotional harm to you, which will not help rebuild a positive relationship with your ex-spouse.

5. Additional resources:
   - 7 social media mistakes you should never make while going through a divorce: http://www.prevention.com/sex/social-media-mistakes-during-divorce
   - Social Media & Divorce – Before, During, and After: http://www.gibsonkerr.co.uk/blog/2016/04/social-media-divorce/
Domestic Violence

There are four types of domestic violence: physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and stalking. The abuser feels the need to have power or control over their partner or children. A divorce may cause the abuser to become more violent because of a loss of power. Here are some signs to be aware of and some things you can do.

Knowledge is Power:

6. Ways an abuser may seek power or control
   - Abusers may threaten to hurt themselves, others, or damage property.
   - Abusers may economically control their partner, so they are unable to leave.
   - Abusers may threaten or use their children to try to regain control

2. The Cycle of Abuse and Violence
   - Stage 1: Tension-building – The abuser will become more controlling and angry.
   - Stage 2: Acute battering – The abuser will lash out and abuse.
   - Stage 3: Honeymoon – The abuser or the victim will apologize and everything will seem happy again. After stage 3, it cycles back to stage 1.

3. Child protection
   - Get an attorney. Ask local victim advocate services, other victims, or local legal services.
   - Representing yourself may be the last option if you have no opportunity to get an attorney. This is not the best option.
   - Protect yourself. Have documentation of conversations, medical history, marriage certificate, all receipts, and bills. These documents should include anything pertaining to you or your children.

4. Safety issues when preparing to leave
   - Know of a safe room in the house that has an exit, but without access to anything that can be used as a weapon
   - Find a safe place you can stay or run to at anytime
   - Make a safety plan
   - Have a savings account in your own name
   - Give extra clothing, keys, money, phone, and important documents to a friend

5. Co-parenting after divorce and keeping the children safe during parenting time
   - Alert the court if continued abuse or control attempts are taken.
   - Have the attorney write set boundaries and have both sides sign them in agreement.
   - Prioritize safety for you and the children
   - Foster positive adjustment for you and the children

6. For more information on Domestic Violence and Divorce:
   - Visit MU Extension Publications Web site at: extension.missouri.edu/explore
Parental Incarceration

When a family member is incarcerated, the family is faced with several difficult challenges. Incarceration leads to children having less contact with the incarcerated parent, and children often desire a relationship with both parents. It is important that children always feel safe and free to express their feelings and thoughts about the incarcerated parent. Relatedly, the giving parent should refrain from criticizing the incarcerated parent in front of the child. Children may be fearful that they will go to jail because their parent went to jail. Affirm that the children will not go to jail as long as they make good choices and obey the law.

Helpful Hints:

1. If the child asks about the incarcerated parent, begin by asking what they know, and give them additional age appropriate details.
   - Confirm that the parent is incarcerated. It is okay to mention if they are in a local county jail or a prison that may be a greater distance away.
   - Depending on the circumstances of the incarceration, a child does not need to be told the exact reason for the incarceration.
     - Elementary school and younger children can be told, “the parent broke the law,” but should not mention the specific law.
     - Middle school and older children can be told the nature of the law, i.e. “the parent was charged with theft.”
   - Depending on the child’s relationship with school peers, a child may be discouraged from disclosing the parent’s incarceration with peers (Rothrauff, n.d.)

2. In most cases, encourage appropriate communication with the incarcerated parent:
   - Writing letters or video conferencing are beneficial ways to maintain contact, unless there is an abusive relationship between the child and parent, or if there is a court order against contact (Poehlmann et al., 2010).
   - In person visits can be beneficial if there is a child-friendly environment at the place of incarceration that supports a positive experience (Poehlmann et al., 2010).

3. Additional resources:


Relocation

When a family is going through a divorce, one parent will usually move into a new home. Refer to the Child Development Chart (Slides 18 – 23) to show how different ages show their distress. Children will adjust faster to change if they are given time in advance to mentally prepare for the change.

Additionally, it will help if the parent can walk the child step-by-step through the moving process, prior to making the move. This will help the child know what to expect and give them a greater sense of control. During the moving process, keep the child involved and ask for their opinions. By the parent showing enthusiasm for the fresh start and new memories that will be made, the child may adjust faster and begin to become excited about the new changes.

Helpful Hints:

1. Make sure the child feels safe and comfortable
   • Reassure the child that they are safe and not alone.
   • If the child must change schools, encourage them to make new friends and talk to the teacher about any concerns you may have.
   • Introduce the child to trusted adults and families in the neighborhood or community that care about you and the child.

2. Keep their thoughts and feelings a priority
   • A child may feel lost during all the changes that they are experiencing, make sure that they feel valued during the process.
   • A child may begin to open up and feel more comfortable if they have an opportunity to personalize their space.
   - For example: hanging pictures, bringing tangible objects such as a teddybear, picking colors to paint the room, etc.

3. Establish a routine
   • After getting settled in the environment, try to re-establish a routine quickly.
   • This will help the child to know what to expect and adjust faster to all the changes that have been going on around them.

4. Maintain communication between households
   • The giving parent should encourage healthy communication between the child and other parent.
   • If a move is longer than an hour away and does not encourage weekly parenting time, set up times for video conference calls or time on the phone to communicate.
Communication, Structure, and Positive Relationships

Parent and child communication is key to a healthy and positive relationship. When a family learns to communicate effectively it creates a more harmonious atmosphere. Ineffective communication techniques can hinder relationship growth and promote negative child behaviors. Shame or guilt should never be used to make your child do something or feel a certain way. If you ask your child not to do something, give them an explanation why. Remember, honesty is always the best policy, tell your child how you feel and why. Make your expectation of them clear. Also, give them solutions to choose from to fix their problems. It is important that children always feel safe and free to express what they are feeling and thinking.

Discipline Helpful Hints:

1. Be Consistent:
   • Have a plan for what to do before bad behavior begins.
   • If using time-out, prepare a space free of toys and devices. Use this designated space for every time-out session.

2. Stay Calm:
   • Losing your temper shows the children it is okay to lose theirs.
   • Ask the child calmly the behavior you want them to do, while maintaining eye contact. If this has been ignored, give the child a warning and tell them the disciplinary action that they will receive if they do not listen (such as time-out).

3. Basic Steps:
   • Make sure your child knows you are unhappy with their behavior.
   • Do not repeat a command
   • Consequences for non-compliance should follow immediately
   • Don’t argue

4. Praise Good Behavior:
   • When children do something you like, immediately reward them with praise.
   • Do not use negative language such as, “I’m glad you finally did the dishes, for once,” or “It’s about time you cleaned your room.”
   • Rewards or praise should be immediate.

5. Remember:
   • Try to limit the behaviors you use time-out for.
   • Praise children for good behaviors often and immediately.

Structure Helpful Hints:

1. Helping with Homework:
   • Taking an interest in your child’s schoolwork can make them more successful.
   • Get to know their teachers by going to conferences and school events.
   • Set aside a time and place for homework.
   • Children should attempt homework on their own.
Let them try to correct their own mistakes.
If they are struggling, give suggestions to keep them on the right track.
- Show off their work to let them know how proud you are of what they do.
- If there are continued problems, talk to their teacher.

2. Getting Children to Sleep:
- School-aged children need between 9-12 hours of sleep each night.
- Have a consistent schedule for going to sleep and waking.
- Have “down time” 30 minutes before bed.
  - Down time routines should include, bath time, reading together, or other relaxing activities.

3. Consistency Between Homes:
- Each parent should try to have the same approach to discipline and have the same rules in each home.
- Discuss with the giving parent when homework, meals, and bath typically take place to try to remain consistent between homes.
- Provide children with a special backpack, or a way to keep everything they need together for transition between homes.
  - This could consist of belongings important to them, such as a favorite game, book, or shoes.
  - If they are already comfortable in both homes, they may not need a backpack. However, they may have an item they always want with them.
  - For school-aged children, a separate backpack from their school backpack should be used. Special items should not be taken to school, as they may be lost or stolen.
- Give children their own calendar so they know when there will be a transition and any other events they need to be ready for.

Positive Relationships Helpful Hints:

1. Spend Time Together:
- Spend at least 30 minutes a day listening to your child without distractions. If you have more than one child, spend individual time with each of them.
  - Let them lead the discussion.
  - Ask questions about them, and what is important to them.
- Have fun together. (Ex: play sports, bake, read, play games, be silly without embarrassing them)
- Dine together as many nights as possible.

2. Tell Them You Love Them:
- Don’t be afraid to tell them you love them.
- Give affection, such as hugs, frequently

3. Know your child’s friends:
- Friends can have more of an influence on your child than you do. Know his or her friends and how they behave to try to direct your child on the right path.
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<td>Language builds and matures; memory and imagination develop</td>
<td>May regress to an earlier behavior</td>
<td>Keep familiar items with them to provide consistency and comfort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent changes in emotion</td>
<td>Changes in emotion are exaggerated</td>
<td>Help them express thoughts and feelings with words; reassure them of your love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can feel safe outside of primary caregiver’s home</td>
<td>Ask repeatedly about the absence of the other parent</td>
<td>Keep other caregivers updated on changes and how to support your child</td>
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## Preschoolers

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<td>Can talk about their feelings and needs</td>
<td>Fear losing parental love and may feel abandoned</td>
<td>Spend extra time with your child (10-15 min.) before you plan to separate from them for a period of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning to control their emotions</td>
<td>Strongly affected by parent conflicts</td>
<td>Give your child permission to love and enjoy the other parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wonder if they will still be loved if they oppose a parent's will</td>
<td>May fantasize about their parents being together and may deny the divorce ever happened</td>
<td>Give firm, consistent, and sensitive messages about the divorce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn behaviors from adults</td>
<td>Can take on stress and tension from the parent</td>
<td>Consistent affection and boundaries; learn to de-stress yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can misunderstand social situations</td>
<td>Often fearful and sad; may appear emotionally needy</td>
<td>Help your child grieve; reassure them they did not cause the divorce; read books about divorce</td>
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## Infants

- Sense how their parents feel and behave
- Learn through physical interactions
- When basic needs are met, attachments to caregivers are developed
- Increasingly fearful of separation and strangers

**What you can do to help**
- Short but frequent contact can help with attachment
- Keep normal schedules and routines
- Keep favorite familiar items nearby at each home
- Hold infants frequently and securely using a calm and soothing voice with good eye contact
### Preschoolers

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### Early Elementary (6-9 years old)

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<tr>
<td>Can now have feelings of guilt and realize others have feelings</td>
<td>Sensitive to loyalty conflicts between parents; feel duality to one parent when they love other parent</td>
<td>Reassure your children that they did not cause the divorce; reinforce rules and give positive feedback; read books about divorce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making new friends and getting along with teachers</td>
<td>Possible withdrawing from social contacts</td>
<td>Let your child maintain contact with friends and stay in the same activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use moral judgment; learning cause and effect, begin thinking of the future</td>
<td>Fear the loss of a parent’s love; have difficulty understanding people can be both “good” and “bad”</td>
<td>Offer regular contact with each parent; encourage your child to express thoughts and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult behaviors teach more than words</td>
<td>Can understand a schedule of alternating between homes</td>
<td>Minimize the amount of change to your child’s schedule</td>
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### Preteen (9 to 12 years old)

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<td>Self-conscious</td>
<td>Demand an explanation of the divorce</td>
<td>Be honest; explain the divorce in terms they understand and appropriate to their age</td>
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<tr>
<td>Become increasingly independent</td>
<td>May blame the parent they do not agree with for the divorce</td>
<td>Reduce conflict between parents and avoid blaming one another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May question parental rules</td>
<td>Increase in fights because of strong emotions; may feel abandoned and blame themselves</td>
<td>Be consistent with rules and discipline; offer positive feedback as a reward; keep consistent contact with child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can plan and meet goals</td>
<td>Feelings of powerlessness due to divorce</td>
<td>Include children in family decisions when possible</td>
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### Teenagers (13 to 17 years old)

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<td>Figuring out who they are in relation to peer and society rules</td>
<td>Understand the divorce processes and separate themselves from their parent’s actions/reactions</td>
<td>Give permission for independence; give them a say in the scheduling.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Begin developing a sense of purpose, clarifying long-term plans and values</td>
<td>Capable of forming an independent opinion of where and with whom they want to live</td>
<td>Stay involved in their life; avoid role reversal and don’t involve them in adult worries</td>
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<td>Taking increased responsibility for what they do and who they are</td>
<td>Act as if divorce is not a big deal and they can handle it</td>
<td>Be aware that they may be having feelings that they don’t express</td>
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<td>Learning intimacy, honesty, self-disclosure, and trust in relationships</td>
<td>May feel unsure about their own feelings of love, marriage, and families; may feel like they’ve grown up too quickly.</td>
<td>Provide closeness, concern, and fairness; keep family routines and traditions; don’t give extra permission out of parent guilt</td>
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*2016 Terminology Change*
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Answering Questions Your Children Have About Divorce

- Invite conversation
- Help them put their feelings into words
- Affirm their feelings
- Offer support

Why are you getting a divorce?

- The most common question

Why are you getting a divorce?

- Explaining the divorce to your children
  - Talk with them as soon as possible.
  - Hold the meeting with all family members.
  - Schedule plenty of time.
  - Decide in advance what you will say.
  - Be honest and straightforward.
Why are you getting a divorce?
• Explaining the divorce to your children
  – Give a simple reason.
  – Make it age-appropriate.
  – Tell your children they will be loved.
  – Explain the changes.

Why are you getting a divorce?
• Explaining the divorce to your children
  – Empathize with your children.
  – Allow for questions.
  – Explain it again over time.
  – Read books together with younger children.

General Guidelines for Answering Questions
• Think ahead and prepare answers.
• Invite questions and admit that it is difficult.
• Address questions in a neutral way.

Scenario

Is it my fault you got divorced?
Is it my fault you are still fighting?
• Your children may take the blame.
• They may think they caused the conflict.
• Tell them adult problems led to divorce.

Do you still love me?
• Provide reassurance
• Both parents will love and care for them.
• Value your relationship with your child.
Are we ever going to be a family again?
• Be honest.
• Acknowledge difficulty with acceptance.
• Let them know both parents still love them.
• The change will get better with time.

Will we be a family again if I am a perfect kid?
• Kids cannot make parents reunite.
• It takes time to accept the change.
• Tell them that they still have a family.

Who will I live with?
• Make decisions soon.
• Be honest and straightforward.
• Consider your child’s age.

Quiz

Will I go to the same school?
• Consider the affects on your children.
• Give your children information beforehand.
• Anticipate positive and negative reactions.
• Encourage friendships.

What should I tell my friends?
• Friends may need to know.
• Allow your children to tell friends.
• Allow them to decide what they share.
Do I have to go to Mom’s house? Why can’t I see Dad when I want to?

• Custody and visitation decisions made by adults.
• Be supportive.
• Communicate positive messages.
• Give freedom to express feelings.

Conflict Resolution

• Conflict can be positive.
• Kids adjust better with positive conflict.

What not to do

• Avoid conflict at all cost
  – “I’m going to pretend like this isn’t happening.”
• Be defensive
  – “I haven’t done anything wrong. This is all your fault.”
• Overgeneralize the problem
  – “You are never on time.” or “You always do what you want.”

What not to do

• Have to win arguments
  – “I am right, you are wrong.”
• Mind-read
  – “You are late picking up Tyler because you don’t care about him.”
• Make character attacks
  – “You are so ‘needy’ and ‘controlling.’”
How to stay in control during conflict

- Take a time-out
- Take deep breaths
- Count to 5 before saying anything
- Repeat silently “Slow down” to relax
- Think about a relaxing picture
- Focus on yourself as a role model

How to communicate better

- Clearly describe your message
  - Use “I” messages
  - Let others know your thoughts and feelings
- Describe behavior rather than judge it
- Ask for feedback
- Repeat yourself for understanding
- Be aware of your non-verbal messages

Practice

- Problem: Your ex-partner just delivered some clothing for your child and did not include the special pair of shoes you requested.

How to listen better

- Give your full attention
- Listen before responding
- Organize your thoughts before speaking
- Avoid judging the other person
- Confirm what you heard

Steps of Negotiation

- State what you want
- Describe your feelings
- Give reasons for your wants and feelings

Steps of Negotiation

- Reverse perspectives
- Create 3 possible solutions
- Reach an agreement and commit to it
Question

Ask for help if you need it

- Conflict resolution may not work
- You may need to avoid contact
- Alternatives are available
  - Neutral location for visitations
  - Mediators

Mediation

- Help avoid court appearances
- Help you and your ex-spouse solve issues
- You make your own decisions

Benefits of mediation

- In a private setting
- You control the decisions
- Confidential
- Avoid extended litigation
- Can be better on you and your kids

Who is the mediator?

- Impartial person to help both parties
- Not an attorney, but informs your attorney of the mutual decision
- Your attorney then drafts the final court document

What happens in mediation?

- Help resolve immediate concerns
- Help parents separate parenting role from spousal role
- Evaluate present condition and future needs
End of Session 1

• Thank you for participating
• General plan for session 2
• (Post-test)