



Common Reactions to Divorce

Some of the common reactions children have to their parents' divorce are listed below. Children may have different reactions at different ages; however, not all children of the same age will react in the same way. Much depends on the child's emotional maturity and other personal factors, as well as the circumstances surrounding the divorce.

| <u>Age Group</u> | <u>Common Reactions</u> |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Early Childhood (0 - 6 yrs) | Confusion, fear of abandonment, crying, clinging, self blame |
| Late Childhood (7 - 12 yrs) | Worry, anger, sense of loss, feeling rejected, divided loyalties |
| Early Adolescence (13 - 15 yrs) | Confusion, moodiness, insecurity, feeling rejected, shame, anger, withdrawal |
| Late Adolescence (16 - 18 yrs) | Anger, embarrassment, resentment, fear of intimacy, worry, blaming |
| Adult Children | Sadness, resentment, anger, guilt, fear of intimacy, worry, blaming |

Children at Risk

All children experience problems in adjusting to divorce. Most children fear being abandoned or replaced, guilty that they somehow are responsible, and very anxious about what is going to happen. Some children are at greater risk or experience these feelings more intensely.

How do you know when a child is in trouble? Look for extremes. A child may stay depressed with no change or may not seem sad at all. Both would be warning signs. A child might act out constantly across all relationships or may be withdrawn or try to please people. The acting out child will certainly be more easily identified through misbehavior. The child who seems to be in control often gets overlooked. Children who had problems prior to the divorce will also be at greater risk.

Some signs parents should look for to determine when professional help might be needed include:

- when a child is consistently having problems (versus periodic episodes)
- when symptoms get worse rather than better over time
- when there is a sudden or dramatic change
- if a parent can't handle the child's behavior