

Healing Hearts: Regaining a Sense of Family After Family Transitions

A Parenting Seminar Manual



Preface

Family transitions are difficult times for parents and children. There are many emotions involved in adjusting to a major family change and many decisions to be made. Life goes on for all family members and we believe that **you as parents** can pave the way for healthy growth and adjustment for yourselves and your children.

We believe that the information in these seminars, combined with your love and caring, can have a positive impact on your relationship with your child and your child's other parent.

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Chapter One

Family Transitions and the Grief Process What Adults and Children May Experience In a Family Transition

Adult Response To Grief:

Feelings of Profound Sadness and Loss

- loss of dreams, expectations
- loss of extended family
- loss of friendship, sharing
- loss of help, support
- loss of close parent-child relationship
- loss of former partner's loving relationship; companionship

Feelings of Denial

- belief that it won't happen if not dealt with
- nothing has really changed; this is just temporary
- it may have happened, but it's no big deal
- belief that they may be able to get back together

Feelings of Anger

- as a result of “sacrificing for” other (e.g. putting through school)
- as a way to hold onto relationship
- covers hurt — less painful
- at self — for not being able to “fix” or change partner

Feelings of Anxiety

- may worry about money, relationships, jobs, kids, attractiveness, future
- may have never been alone and may not know what to do
- making new friends; having new adult relationships

Feelings of Guilt, Self-Blame

- “If only I had (or hadn’t) done/said something.”
- looks at relationship in a way that puts total responsibility on self
- thinks he/she should be punished for being a failure

Adult Response to Grief: Acceptance Phase

- accepts family transition as a reality
- reestablishes a sense of family and feeling of belonging
- acknowledges sadness at times but goes on with one’s life and activities
- works to experience family happiness; understands what happened in order to have healthier, more satisfying relationships
- disengages from anger
- accepts self and looks forward to the future; establishes new goals and relationships outside family; strengthens support network of community, professional or religious ties.

Children’s Response To Grief

Like the adult, the child will experience feelings of loss, denial, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety and acceptance. These losses, however, are different for the child. The child may be at a different stage in the grief process than the parent, and like the parent, may move back and forth between different stages of grief. Feelings of loss, anger, etc. may be reactivated at later stages due to individual/family changes or special events.

Feelings of Loss:

- loss of childhood innocence
- loss of “emotional freedom”; may be burdened by worries about parents
- loss of financial security
- loss of fun time with family
- loss of sense of family — children feel cut off from relatives, parent they have less time with; feeling of being alone
- loss of close relationship with parent the child doesn’t live with or see often

Feelings of Denial

- “this can’t be happening;” “if I don’t deal with it, it will go away”
- confusion of fantasy and reality; child may try to hide family reality and talk as if parents are still together
- may unconsciously get into trouble or get sick to “bring” parents back together
- “it only affects my parents, not me”
- although child may know in reality that parents will never get back together, may hold onto the wish that they will

Feelings of Anger

- sense of moral unfairness: “you can’t do this to me”
- blames parent who left or who hurt other parent
- anger at feeling powerless about the situation
- keeps distance from own and parent’s pain
- anger at loss of human/material resources; not having the “same as peers” or not being able to do things peers do
- anger at incongruence between what parent says and does

Feelings of Anxiety

- may ask if both parents still love him/her
- worries about who will take care of him/her presently, and in future (younger children worry about consistency in routine)
- worries about future if something should happen to the live-in parent
- worries that family will not have enough money for food, college
- concern over who will care for parent when the child is not there
- may feel responsible for parent

Feelings of Guilt

- belief that the child caused parent to fight; (overheard name mentioned in argument, so feels guilty)
- feels guilty because the child thinks he/she could have been better, nicer; performed better in school
- younger child is egocentric and thinks world revolves around him/her, so he/she must have done something to cause the family transition

Feelings of Relief

- reduction of tension
- reduction of fighting
- more time with each parent
- closer relationship with at least one parent

Child's Response to Grief: The Acceptance Phase

- accepts family transition as a reality
- reestablishes a sense of family and feeling of belonging
- acknowledges sadness, but goes on with one's life, with own activities,
- works to experience family happiness
- understands what happened in order to have healthier, more satisfying relationships
- disengages from anger
- accepts self and looks forward to the future; establishes new goals, new relationships outside family, stronger support network of community, professional or religious ties

The Grief Process: How Parents Can Help Their Children

1. Let your child know that you are interested and willing to talk about thoughts and feelings. Set aside a special time for sharing. This may take repeated efforts and you may sometimes be the only one to share.

You might sit down on your child's bed or take a walk and say: "I know these last few weeks have been hard for all of us. I've felt sad; other times angry; other times relieved. I think it's important for us to share and understand each other's feelings. I know it's scary, and you may worry about hurting me. But feelings are neither right or wrong, and you will only help me by letting me know what you're feeling. We may have some of the same feelings. Let's try, O.K.?" Tell your child that "it's O.K. if we have different feelings."

2. Discuss the topic of relationships with your child. Talking about your own relationship can be a rewarding experience for both of you. Discuss the history of your relationship, citing examples of happier times such as when you met or the birth of the children. This helps children to gain a healthier perspective and understand some of the problems and changes that occurred as well.
3. Do not try to talk your child out of feeling a certain way. Let your child know that his/her feelings are accepted and understood. A wish that "Mommy and Daddy will get back together" may be unrealistic and impractical but is nonetheless quite normal.
4. Try to correct ideas that may be causing your child to be unnecessarily upset. For example, your child may incorrectly blame one parent for problems in the relationship and feel unduly angry, or he may blame himself and feel guilty. Let your child know that he/she may ask questions about the family transition or about what will happen in the future. Listen and answer the questions honestly. Expect that your child may bring up the same questions/concerns at later stages of development.
5. Try to understand your own thoughts, behavior, and feelings and how they affect your child. If you communicate feelings of extreme hopelessness, anger, anxiety or guilt, your child may react to these emotions.

6. If a situation is upsetting your child, help him/her problem solve by discussing possible alternatives.
7. Encourage your child to associate with others who have experienced a family transition and to read related books by and/or for children.
8. Make a point of sharing positive thoughts and feelings with your child. This will help your child realize that a family transition does not signify failure and that life can be filled with success and satisfaction.
9. If your child expresses a sense of deprivation because of limited finances, recognize that:
 - particularly in our culture, the giving of material goods signifies caring. Your child may misinterpret your inability to give “things” as a sign of withdrawal of your affection
 - reassure your child that this is not the case, and whenever possible, demonstrate your caring in ways that do not cost money
 - children can also manipulate parents by emphasizing material objects
 - children want material goods to gain acceptance from their peers. Help your child measure his self-worth by means other than outward appearances. Offer assistance in selecting purchases and finding ways to earn extra money.
10. Teach your adolescent child how to handle emergencies when you are not home. Look for structured activities to occupy your child while you work, or locate families your child can stay with when you are gone.
11. Discuss family transition-related facts with your child. If you have a legal document stating what will happen to your child if a custodial parent dies or becomes ill, show it to him/her. If there is no legal document, discuss your plans and ask your child how he/she feels about them.
12. Try not to overburden your child with adult worries. It is helpful and important to be realistic about money. When there are constant battles between former partners over money, children feel caught in the middle and will sometimes take on the worries of adults.
13. Set aside consistent sharing times, even if the actual amount of time is very small.
14. Familiarize yourself with community activities and their times and locations. Allow your child to choose at least one activity that interests him/her. Encourage your child to make calls to get accurate information about activities. This will reinforce your child’s sense of responsibility and commitment.

15. Use neighbors, singles groups, and other community organizations to meet the needs of different family members. For example, being part of a network may help you find transportation to an activity for your child while you are at work.
16. Share time and activities with other families who have experienced a family change. Companionship reduces feelings of isolation and reinforces the idea that you are a family, will survive, and can enjoy yourselves.
17. Spend time with other adults in order to reduce your sense of loneliness. In a couples-oriented society, it is difficult to be single. This is why singles organizations and support groups are so important. Your efforts to seek satisfying experiences will serve as an excellent model for your child.
18. Above all, do not be overly demanding of yourself or your child, especially during the early stages of a family transition. Stress and life's many pressures make it impossible to be super-chef, super-housecleaner, super-student, super-employee, and super-parent. Be patient with yourself and your child during this period of adjustment. Set priorities and keep trying. Accept the fact that everything will not get done!



Chapter Two

Changes in the Parent-Child Relationship

Explaining Family Transition to Children: An Overview

Parents often find it difficult to explain family transition to their children. They don't want to hurt the child or cause more pain, and instead may avoid the subject or deny what is happening. This denial reinforces the child's confusion, fears, or fantasies of reconciliation.

When parents explain the family transition at the outset, this sends a very strong message to the child that he/she counts and is important. By taking the time to communicate with the child, the parents demonstrate that they are there for him/her, and are committed to the child's future.

Explaining Family Transitions to Children: Developmental Needs

Younger children

Younger children fear abandonment and need reassurance. Because of concrete, egocentric thinking, they need reassurance that their routine with each parent will continue. (e.g., Susie, age four, will go to the same nursery school each day; parent will pick her up; she will have her favorite toys, blanket, stuffed animal at each home and have consistent meal, nap, bedtimes. It's not her fault. Mom and Dad still love her.)

Elementary aged children

Elementary aged children need reassurance that they are loved and supported by their parents. They also want assurance that their parents will be all right. Because children are quite moralistic at this phase and may have difficulty seeing shades of gray, reassure them that they don't have to decide who is right or wrong. Children may sometimes want to protect the parent they see as vulnerable and be angry at one or both parents. This is why it is so important to present a relationship as something between two people that one person cannot be totally responsible for. Explain that each parent will be capable of providing for the child and self. When this is not possible, the child needs continuous explanation (such as when parent is mentally ill). The child may need to be told over and over that it is all right to wish parents would get back together but that they probably won't.

Middle schoolers

Middle schoolers are very self-conscious and have a need to be like everyone else. They may deny that the family transition affects them. They may refuse to talk; feel very angry or confused; and avoid closeness with parents (which they do at this time anyway). There is a great need to respect their privacy and not embarrass them. With their own sense of disorganization at this stage, youngsters need as much structure as possible and clear, consistent guidelines from both parents about how their lives will be with each parent.

High school aged youth

High school aged youth are able to understand more and as a result may experience angry feelings that parents didn't "practice what they preach." They may be able to separate more from the family situation or may worry about the future: college, money, and the well being of parents. Because of their ability to assess several factors in a situation, high school aged youth may blame parents less. They need reassurance that there will be an opportunity for them to participate in making decisions that involve them. They are growing in their decision making abilities and have many activities that are important to them. It's important to remember that this is just as much a loss for these youngsters as it is for younger children.

Changes In the Communication, Discipline, and Time Spent Together: An Overview

Separation brings change. Whether you spend every day with your child or more limited time, changes in communication, discipline, time spent together, and living arrangements will occur.

In this section, we'll review some of these changes and recommend ways to help strengthen the parent-child relationship. Although separation brings change, you can utilize this time to establish a closer relationship with your child.

Changes In Communication

- may need more time to communicate; often have less time
- may be more difficult to communicate
- parental concern about what to share about family transition; can share too much or too little
- may not know how to respond except in a tense, argumentative manner
- parents and children may have different feelings about the family transition; this can create tension
- may be awkwardness due to geographic and emotional distance; parent may fill time with activities, thus diminishing the opportunity to communicate in a close, honest fashion
- parent may assume child doesn't need him/her; believes youngster "should" initiate contact
- the child feels rejected or unloved by parent who stops contact or communicates infrequently

Communication: Guidelines For Parents

1. From the beginning of the family transition, express your feelings to your child and encourage him/her to do the same. This prevents misunderstanding and models open communication.
2. Live by the rule "I am the parent" and set an example for your child. If child doesn't initiate contact, then you contact him/her.
3. Accept the fact that an effective parent cannot always be a youngster's friend. As you enforce rules, your child may not initially be pleased with you.
4. Make time to communicate; have times when you are totally available for child (without doing chores, etc.).
5. Establish a businesslike partnership with the child's other parent and when possible, support agreed upon rules, chores, etc.
6. Communicate consistently and frequently, especially with the younger child. Remember, a child's sense of time differs from an adult's, and children need concrete, consistent communication.
7. Discuss reasons for the family transition in a manner appropriate for child.
8. Understand child's developmental stages and needs; respond appropriately.
9. Have other adults to talk to; avoid overburdening child with your adult concerns.
10. Don't make assumptions about what child is thinking or feeling. Ask, reflect, clarify.

Encouraging Effective Communication With Your Child

1. Model the expression of feelings for your child.

Many children tell us “I don’t talk to Daddy (or Mommy) about my feelings... he/she) doesn’t like to talk about feelings.” If you have difficulty discussing negative feelings, admit this to your child. Express the desire to grow in this area.

Example: “I know I’m not very good at this, but...”

If you are upset, do not expect your child to provide you with reassurance and support, but be honest with your child about your feelings.

Example: “I’m feeling very sad right now” or “I’m feeling angry at someone from work.”

If you have encountered a situation similar to one encountered by your child, describe how you felt.

Example: “I used to have a hard time standing up to grandma. I felt very scared. I wonder if you feel the same way.”

2. Create a climate which is conducive to good communication.

Your child may be more likely to talk openly with you within the context of a relaxed shared experience (while talking at bedtime, reading together, taking a walk, during a leisurely car ride, doing art work, etc.)

3. Do not give up if your invitation to talk is refused.

Let your child know that you are interested and available in the future. Try again.

4. Follow general guidelines for good communication:

Make eye contact; position yourself on child’s level; avoid interrupting or being interrupted by telephone, siblings, etc.; pace yourself according to child’s communication style, giving him/her time to answer questions.

5. Don’t go overboard. Stop when your child seems ready.

Respect your child’s desire to stop talking. Some children say “I don’t like to bring things up with my mom because she just goes on and on and on.”

6. Use door openers:

“I’d like to hear about that”; “I’m concerned... would you like to talk about that”; “I’m here if you want to talk about it”; “I love you and care about you. Let me know if I can help.”

7. **Communicate empathy, that you understand the situation, your child's thoughts and feelings.**
 - About a situation: "It seems that I'm so busy lately that I don't have time for you."
 - About his thoughts: "Do you sometimes think maybe I don't care about you?"
 - About his feelings: "I can understand why you might feel hurt... if I were in your shoes, I might feel hurt too."
 - Don't tell your child how he/she feels. Offer it as a hypothesis to be tested.

8. **Expect and accept the fact that your child's feelings may not match your own.**

Your child may feel sad while you feel relieved. You may feel angry while your child may have an attitude of acceptance.

9. **Don't try to talk your child out of feeling a particular way. Let him decide if he would like to feel differently.**

Express your concerns about your child feeling scared, sad or angry and offer to help him/her find ways to feel better.

10. **During a calm time, brainstorm alternatives to help child gain control over aggressive behavior.**
 - avoid shouting matches
 - avoid counter-accusations
 - avoid counter-threats
 - express interest in what your child has to say
 - express regret when appropriate
 - If your child is being physically or verbally aggressive, let him/her know that this behavior is unacceptable but that you would like to understand his feelings when he can talk calmly about them.

11. **Do not pump child for information about your former partner for your benefit, but express interest in your child's life with his/her other parent.**

Ask open questions such as: "How was your weekend with your mom?" "Would you like to tell me about your evening with dad?" "How are things going with your new stepmother?" "What's it like to have two more kids in your family with dad?" "What kinds of things have you been doing together?"

12. **If your child brings up a problem concerning his/her other parent or step-parent, listen nonjudgmentally, act as a sounding board, and let your child decide and practice how he/she would like to handle the problem.**

Don't tell your child what he/she needs to do (and don't do it for him/her) when problem solving.

13. Open up taboo areas (such as alcohol and drug abuse and physical abuse) which have impacted your child.

Discuss the problem matter of factly and nonjudgmentally. Express your concern about the impact it may be having on your child. Without your encouragement, your child may be reluctant to broach certain areas.

If you or your child's other parent had a problem with anger and there has been verbal or physical abuse, discuss this with your child:

Example: "You know Susie, your dad and I have had a serious problem with anger. Sometimes we have gotten so angry that he and I have ended up shouting, saying nasty things to each other and even hitting or throwing things. I'm concerned that this may have been very hard for you. It would be very important for us to talk about this. Do you remember that happening? Are there times when it seems to be happening lately? Are there ever times when you feel frightened?"

If you or your child's other parent has had problems with alcohol abuse you might say:

Example: "You know Mary, one of the problems that led to our separation was that I believed your father drank too much. There were times when he stayed away from the house to drink or sometimes he drank in the house. Sometimes he lost his temper more easily when he had been drinking. That was scary for me. Sometimes he became very quiet and kept to himself. That was lonely for me. Do you remember any of these things? Are there ever times when you see daddy drinking? Do you ever feel uncomfortable with it? Sometimes when a person has a problem with drinking it is almost as if there is a rule that says "Don't talk about it — pretend it doesn't exist. But it is very important that we talk about it."

Communicating With Your Teenager

1. Catch them when you can! Teens are filled with energy and activities and are usually on the run. A concise, five-minute discussion can be more meaningful than a half-hour talk (which your teen may label "lecture".)
2. Stop and talk when your teen wants to share. Kids usually give "clues" when they need your attention. Stopping to sit, listen, look at them and respond communicates that you care, and makes it easier the next time one of you needs to talk.
3. Understand their development. They may be experiencing a difficult time, too. They are making decisions about their future, are half "out the door" physically and emotionally, and are struggling to achieve independence. Kids need support and encouragement; let them hear what they are doing right. We often hear, "Just because I am tall doesn't mean I don't need a hug once in a while." When you feel overwhelmed and can't help with a particular situation, teach your teen how to use outside resources such as guidance counselors or clergy.

4. Use “I feel” statements (rather than “you did or said”) to convey your feelings and give your child the opportunity to respond in a similar manner. Kids at this stage intellectually exercise their abstract reasoning and may question you a lot. To avoid defensive behavior, restrict your communication to the item you are discussing, (e.g. don’t bring up past events); respond specifically to the situation you are discussing; and give your child an opportunity to respond.
5. Expect changes in relationships. Often, adolescents miss a relationship with a parent they may not have been close to, and may ask to live with that parent to try to achieve a greater degree of closeness. This is not a rejection of the live-in parent, but rather a need for assurance, love and acceptance from both parents when possible. Honestly share with your child any feelings and concerns you might have concerning a change in his/her living/visiting arrangements.
6. Be honest about your feelings concerning the family transition and try to share them with your teen. This will convey the message that it’s O.K. to share feelings. A helpful reminder: although you may have gone on with your life and may want to share your dating experience with your teen, your child may still be grieving over the family transition and might resent your dating.
7. Time outs can do wonders. This can be a volatile stage for teens, and with a major family change, all tempers may be short. During a calm time, discuss strategies to avoid shouting matches. One suggestion: when a person feels like he is losing control, he can signal the other person and talking can cease until both parties are ready to resume.
8. Acknowledge all the positive things you can about your teen as well as the pressures he/she faces. Just as you have difficult days at work, kids have difficult days in school and on the job. The caring you model will be returned by your teen eventually.

Changes in Discipline

Many parents shy away from discipline during a family transition because they feel badly or guilty about what their children are experiencing. While a loving, concerned parent may think he/she is being more flexible or compassionate to overlook misbehavior, this may lead to bad habits and problems later on. Although it is important in any grief situation for parents to empathize and be somewhat flexible, children’s feelings of security and safety are reinforced when parents set clear, consistent, age appropriate, enforceable guidelines. In fact, many youngsters often say, “My real parent is the one who makes me brush my teeth and do my homework.”

The following list outlines some of the changes in discipline that parents must confront during a family transition:

- discipline is more arbitrary; less time to discipline and enforce rules

- parent may not want to jeopardize relationship by supporting other parent's discipline or having any rules at his/her house
- emotionally burdened parent may count on older children to supervise siblings or listen to parent's problems
- many older children can be left on their own; parents may neglect/not be around to enforce rules and consequences concerning cars, curfews, school, jobs
- parents may be lax on discipline because they feel badly for the child, may compete for "favored" parent status, or may compete to be child's friend.
- parents may not follow through with discipline because they don't have the time or energy, or don't know how to implement consequences

Anger Management

Children learn how to express their thoughts, feelings and anger from their parents. Use this system for yourself and to teach it to your children. Remember, parents are a child's first teacher in all matters of the heart.

While it is ok to be angry, it is not acceptable to express anger in hurtful and destructive ways. Most people lump a lot of emotions under the umbrella of anger and store up feelings until they explode. This is not healthy. That is where anger management comes in; it allows yourself or your child to have angry feelings and deal with them in a healthy way.

There are three points to remember when managing anger: **DETECT, DIFFUSE, DEAL.**

Detect



Get in touch with your feelings and understand that there is a continuum of emotions ranging from slightly annoyed to enraged. Anger is different than any other emotion in that it elicits a physiological response from the body due to increased flow of adrenaline. This sensation is useful to humans in a fight or flight situation, but not in dealing with homework battles or a disagreement with your child's other parent!

You might experience physiological cues such as sweating, heart racing, hair standing up, and rapid speech that let you know you are becoming angry.

Diffuse

Now that you recognize that you are beginning to feel angry, it's time to deal with the problem, right? Wrong. The body takes about forty five minutes to an hour to return to its normal state. If you stay in the situation that made you angry, physically or by re-hashing it in your mind, that time lengthens. If you do something to expend energy, that time may shorten.

Deal

After you have had a break and feel ready to deal with the situation, try some of these communication and problem-solving strategies.

Communication Strategies:

1. Both speaker and listener should agree that it is a good time to talk.
2. Use "I" messages.
3. Practice active listening.
4. When responding restate, reflect, and clarify your message.
5. Make sure your message is congruent in both content and feelings.

Problem-Solving Strategies:

1. Respond to your child after you have had a chance to reflect on the request and your or your child's needs. An instant response is not usually required.
2. Do not respond out of anger or in a way that is not child-focused.
3. Be honest with yourself about the source of your anger. Take a time-out, reduce your tension and brainstorm how your or your child's needs might be met.
4. Think about the consequences of each alternative and when you are ready, discuss them with your child. Prioritize the impact of each alternative and reach an agreement.
5. Agree to evaluate how the solution worked and how you could do things differently next time.

Prevention

We all have "triggers" or stimuli that press the right button to set us off. Know your "buttons" and your child's "buttons" and avoid them. Know also that your child's other parent most likely knows your buttons and may advertently or inadvertently push them. Remember that it is your choice how you will respond. Some strategies to do this are:

- Deal with your feelings as they occur and get in touch with the signs discussed above.
- If you can, express your feelings in a constructive, assertive manner. If you can't, do something to diffuse them first, such as counting to ten, taking a brisk walk or run, praying, and/or doing some "self-talking."

- Before the anger button is pushed, try to empathize with the person involved. Put yourself in his or her shoes and think about what it must be like for that person. The more you model empathy, constructive communication, and problem solving skills, the more you will teach your child to do the same.
- Before you become enraged, check out your own thoughts and feelings:
 - Am I upset because my child doesn't care? Or is this an age appropriate request? Am I covering up other emotions such as hurt or fear? What would happen if I told my child, for example, that I was hurt that he wanted to skip our time together?
 - Am I responding to my child or to my former partner? Are hurt, anger or other emotions getting in the way of my relationship with my child?
 - Are my expectations realistic?
 - Have I expressed my needs directly?
 - Am I making assumptions without checking them out?

Guidelines For Parents

1. Know your child's developmental stage and develop realistic expectations based on his/her age. Renegotiate new rules as your child's needs change.
2. Prioritize which rules and consequences are critical and which are negotiable.
3. Discuss rules and consequences with your child during a peaceful, nonconflictual time. Seek his/her input.
4. Only set rules that you can enforce; you can't expect the other parent to behave as you would like him/her to. Work on developing consistent rules as part of a constructive coparenting relationship with the child's other parent.
5. Set agreed upon consequences for violation of rules, and follow through.
6. Remind child of rules in your home to avoid confusion. Make a chart of chores/rules.
7. Understand that children will not thank a parent for being "tough" and following through with discipline.
8. Work with the school on a consistent basis, not just when there are problems.
9. Build networks of parental support.

Changes in time spent with child

- less time for one or both parents
- parent who is with child every day may need to work two jobs, be a 24 hour parent; may not have leisure time to be with child
- parent who doesn't see child consistently may feel pressure to do everything with child; whirlwind of activities can be overwhelming to child

- fewer quality hours with parent because of multiple tasks
- possible loss of patience due to work, bills, family transition-related matters, stress
- parent may think child doesn't want to spend time with him/her; child may have own time pressures
- there may be avoidance if communication/contact is inconsistent, or if relationship seems awkward to parent and/or child
- parents may be emotionally unavailable or geographically distant. Parents are coping with major financial, social, and emotional concerns and may not be as available to children.
- if a child spends a significant amount of time with one parent, that parent may feel increased tension because of limited financial resources or stress of being 24 hour parent
- child may reverse roles and become caretaker and/or confidant for parent, thus stifling youngster's development and contact with peers
- after adjusting to the family transition, parent and child may spend quality time together and be very close. Yet sometimes, if the parent relies too much on the child, the relationship can become too dependent for each and too powerful for the child. As a result, when the parent begins to date and gets involved in other adult relationships, the child may feel angry, abandoned, or unimportant.

Guidelines for Parents

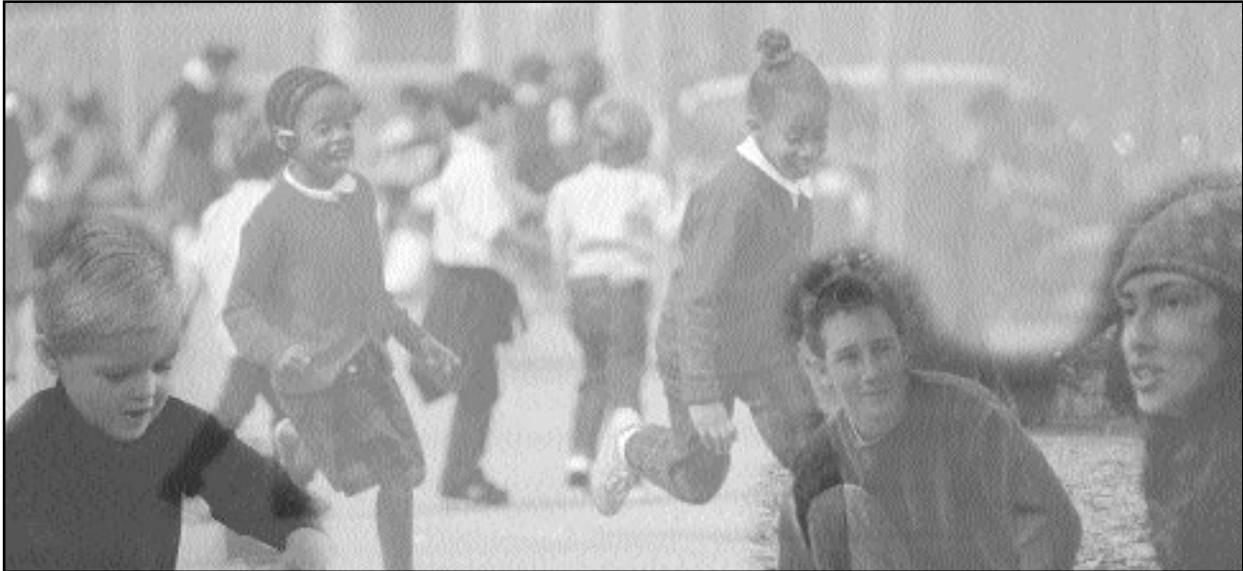
1. Prioritize and be realistic about what you're capable of doing. Part of accepting this change is acknowledging that everything can't remain the same. If you get home at 6:30 p.m. and your child goes to sleep at 8:30, try to devote one hour to helping child do homework and reading a story, sharing a game or talking, or watching a favorite TV show together.
2. Include child in choosing and doing chores. (e.g. have child work with you to prepare dinner; have a list of chores posted on refrigerator; reward younger child with stickers and other age appropriate items.)
3. When you don't have daily contact with your child, prioritize the time you want to spend with him/her. Plan with your child to:
 - develop a routine that makes your house a home (chores, homework, bedtime)
 - arrange times to talk or write letters between visits
4. Plan quality time.
 - build in special times just with child (no T.V./phone)
 - ask for help from friends if you need transportation
 - ask other families to join you and your child in various activities
 - negotiate time with older children
 - build on interests you or your child have
 - attend children's team games; other significant activities
 - if you haven't spent time with child, begin with brief periods of time

- share feelings about your relationships with child
 - expect that your time with child will change as he/she grows
5. Be honest with children about level of emotional giving you're capable of right now.
- develop your own support systems so you don't rely on child for emotional support

Guidelines for Parent-Child Time

1. Arrange visit with child ahead of time; clear it with other parent before informing child. If parents don't communicate, clear times through attorney or designated third party.
2. Pick child up at his/her home and be courteous to other parent. Do not use this pick-up or drop-off time to discuss concerns about child or disagree with other parent.
3. Be flexible and fair with child: If child has other activities, allow him/her to participate and accept responsibility for transportation. Allow changes in time with child based on need and age.
4. Have a place for your child and when possible, have duplicates of child's essentials and favorites (e.g., stuffed animals, etc.). Invite child to decorate his/her space.
5. Know your child and let your child know you:
 - Learn how to feel comfortable communicating with child (see handout). Be yourself; don't feel you have to entertain or sell yourself to child.
 - Plan favorite outings, meals, activities you can share; include child in discussion.
 - Don't push or force your relationship on child.
6. Treat other parent with respect:
 - Don't ask child questions about or bad-mouth other parent.
 - Don't put child in middle. When they are loved and respected, children have enough love for each parent; it's not necessary to compete for a child's love.
7. Work with other parent based on child's needs.
 - Communicate about daily routines, structure, how time will be supervised and free time will be spent.
 - Enforce consequences you and other parent have agreed upon.
8. Establish safety rules for child in all situations to prepare him/her for possible emergencies.

Examples: What to do when child is alone and someone calls for parent; when a relative is drinking and is supposed to transport child; when someone is behaving inappropriately.
9. If you are involved in other adult relationships, make special time with child.



Chapter Three

Child Development and Family Transitions

Infant's Developmental Stage

1. Development begins with hearing, touching, tasting, mouthing, seeing; child begins to locomote (crawl, walk); learns to manipulate objects; explores environment; learns to communicate. An environment rich in stimulation and encouragement from primary caretaker fosters intellectual development. Caretaker models and encourages language development by talking, cooing, and singing.
2. When primary caretaker holds and touches infant lovingly and meets physical needs in a predictable manner, infant develops positive attitudes about himself as lovable and worthwhile and develops positive feelings about his body and the experience of being close to others.
3. Infant's sense of trust in others develops out of loving, predictable relationship with parent. The infant discriminates between parent and others more clearly between eight and twelve months of age. He/she experiences anxiety when introduced to strangers or separated from parent. Social responsiveness requires frequent interaction with caretaker (talking, smiling, cooing, singing, touching).
4. The infant experiences a sense of security when caretaker (or consistent substitute) is calm and nurturing, biological needs are met predictably, environment is familiar, schedule is consistent, and overstimulation (loud noise, bright lights, sudden movement) is avoided.

5. Infant is completely dependent upon adult caretaker to meet health and safety needs. Infant has low immunity, is susceptible to illness, and requires frequent health care for immunizations and well child visits. As infant becomes mobile, he/she is more vulnerable to injury and requires constant supervision.

Impact of Family Transition

1. Parent who is absent or preoccupied with personal concerns and responsibilities may fail to provide stimulating/rewarding home or daycare environment. Optimal early intellectual development may be compromised.
2. Infant may be less central in parent's life, with needs met in a detached, haphazard manner. Parent may be impatient; may reject infant and see baby as a reminder of former partner, failed marriage or as an obstacle to future life. Infant may incorporate negative attitudes about self.
3. Parent's absence due to employment or other responsibilities, shifting of infant from parent to parent, or use of multiple caretakers may produce intense anxiety and interfere with establishment of strong parent-child bond and sense of trust in interpersonal relationships. Overburdened, distraught parents may fail to stimulate and reward social responsiveness.
4. Because of possible frequent changes in caretaker and environment, infant's physical needs may be met unpredictably or inconsistently. Infant's environment may be overstimulating (parental fighting, daycare). Infant may become anxious as parent communicates anxiety through touch or tone of voice.
5. Parent may be unaccustomed to caring for infant single-handedly and unfamiliar with health and safety needs. Infant placed in childcare is exposed to more infections and diseases, with increased incidence of illness and possible safety hazards.

Helping Your Infant Adjust to Family Transitions

1. Create a stimulating environment in which infant can use all his senses: touch, hearing, and sight. Provide age appropriate toys, mobiles, room decorations, and music. Ensure that important belongings are available in the homes of each parent and in daycare.
2. Respond in warm, positive ways to infant's achievements (smiling, making sounds, grasping a rattle, drinking from a bottle, cup, etc.).
3. Communicate (interact) with infant by speaking, rocking, singing and smiling.

4. Provide consistency in daily schedule re: feedings, napping, bathing, bedtime. Plan cooperatively with other parent to minimize changes in the infant's environment and schedule.
5. Arrange for peaceful, undisturbed time to feed, bathe, read to, and sing to baby. Avoid parent-parent conflict in infant's presence.
6. If infant needs to be cared for outside of the home, minimize the number of caregivers. If infant resides primarily with one parent, allow frequent contact with second parent (brief if necessary).
7. If daycare is necessary, thoroughly assess safety and cleanliness of environment, ability of caregiver to provide intellectual stimulation, one-to-one attention, and nurture. Check experience of caregivers and call references. Familiarize caregiver with child's behavior, needs and routine. Spend time with caregiver before infant is alone with him/her to allow infant to become familiar with new environment and adapt to the caregiver.
8. Gradually introduce infants to neighbors and relatives to establish relationships.
9. Arrange for appropriate health care and keep a record of well visits, illness, immunizations, and medications. Communicate with infant's other parent regularly regarding health, illness, immunizations, medication and changing safety needs.
10. Be aware that the infant "takes" a great deal and gives back little. Caring for the infant single-handedly may be overwhelming. Parents need to be replenished through adult support systems.

Toddler And Preschooler's Developmental Stage

1. The toddler begins to develop a sense of autonomy (being able to do things for himself). Encouragement and reinforcement from parents fosters autonomy, initiative and a positive self image as the child interacts with his/her environment. The older preschooler gains a sense of initiative and learns to plan and attack a task, taking pleasure in newly acquired physical and mental abilities.
2. Child's thinking is "egocentric" (the world revolves around him) and "magical" (difficulty distinguishing between fantasy or reality). This stage is marked by rapid development of intelligence (including acquisition of knowledge, thinking skills and language), gross motor skills (hopping, trike riding, etc.) and fine motor skills (drawing, painting, cutting, Legos, etc.) Child is extremely active and inquisitive and is highly demanding of parents' time and attention.
3. Child is extremely active and is not yet capable of monitoring his/her own safe behavior.

4. The preschooler, who is learning to distinguish between right and wrong, tests limits frequently and is often oppositional and defiant. Child develops a sense of security as he/she learns to control his own impulses (toileting, aggression) and realizes that parents will set limits to ensure control. Development of self-control is fostered by parents who set clear expectations, monitor behavior and reinforce positive behavior.

Child's self control may regress in times of stress due to the family transition or when shifting from the home of one parent to the other.

5. Child continues to require large amounts of nurture and a close bond with parent. Child's sphere of attachment grows to include playmates and childcare persons, teachers, and other adults. Child requires opportunities to play with peers to develop social skills and experience the pleasure of friendships.
6. Child gains a sense of security from being able to predict what will happen in his world. Child craves sameness and repetition. Because of child's stage of intellectual development, his ability to predict future events is based largely on recent experiences rather than explanations.

Impact of Family Transition

1. Due to the physical and emotional stress of a family transition, parent may fail to teach child the skills necessary to develop autonomy and initiative. The parent may fail to provide opportunities for exploration and mastery of skills, or may fail to reward achievements or encourage child in times of frustration. Conversely, parent may cling to parenting role as source of happiness during an otherwise unhappy period, fostering a sense of dependence rather than independence in the child.
2. Child may blame self for parental separation because he misbehaved or wished parent would go away. Child's understanding of the family transition (what has happened and why, what will happen in the future) may be very poor. Child may have many questions or worries which parents are not aware of ("will the tooth fairy know where to find me?") Parent who is absent, preoccupied or emotionally and physically drained may have limited energy to talk with or read to child. Parent may fail to provide adequate opportunities for educational play and exploration. Intellectual development may be affected.
3. Parent who has not previously functioned in active parenting role may be unfamiliar with safety hazards and precautions necessary to protect child of this age. Parent may require education to become aware of safety concerns.

4. Development of self-control may be delayed by a parent who is inexperienced in active parenting role, frequently absent, overwhelmed, or feeling guilty. Parent may fail to provide consistent expectations, rewards and consequences, thus hampering development of self control. Child may model inappropriate behavior of a distressed parent who responds impatiently or aggressively. A lack of consistency between households may create insecurity in the child.
5. Child deprived of adult nurture and contact with peers may experience loneliness, become excessively self-reliant, or avoid attachment to others. Conversely, child may develop pervasive neediness for nurture in later life. Child who is deprived of opportunities to play with peers may be handicapped in elementary school and other future social situations.
6. As child's family situation changes and his world no longer fits with past "predictions", he may feel insecure. This may be heightened by inconsistent contact with a parent, a chaotic or unpredictable schedule, frequent changes in caretakers, pre-school or daycare setting, a move to a new home, or differences in routines between households. Insecurity may be indicated by fearfulness, oppositional behavior, clinginess and a reluctance to separate, nightmares, withdrawal from exploration and contact with environment, increased aggression, and regressive behavior (loss of bladder, bowel control, immature speech, thumb sucking, etc.).

Helping Your Toddler/Preschooler Adjust to Family Transitions

1. In each home, provide an environment where child can explore, play and learn. Provide toys for the development of small and large motor skills and opportunities for exercise. Foster the development of independence by teaching and allowing the child to feed, dress, toilet self, etc.
2. Provide opportunities for language development by talking to child, listening to and praising child for communicating, reading to child, playing tapes/cds with stories and songs, naming objects while driving in car, taking walks, etc.
3. Provide opportunities for imaginative play to foster the development of creativity and allow the child to work through negative feelings. Join with the child. Have materials for creative play available in the home of each parent (dolls, play dough, paints, etc.).
4. Allow frequent contact with each parent. If child resides primarily with one parent, avoid lengthy separations and mark on a calendar the times when child will be with each parent. Provide pictures of each parent and parent's home for child to view. Relate time/day in which child will see parent to familiar event.
5. Arrange special times with the child: play, read, hold him/her, go for a walk, etc.

6. Arrange for short periods of supervised play with peers. Monitor child's play for aggression and reinforce appropriate social skills.
7. Provide a toddler-proof environment where child is protected from safety hazards. Supervise at all times. Communicate with child's other parent regarding child's changing safety needs.
8. Provide consistency in the child's routine. Explain who will pick child up, where and when. Allow rituals to be maintained in each home, and allow child to transport security objects (blanket, toy, etc.)
9. Help the child understand the reality of the family transition by providing repeated explanations and using concrete examples. Use dolls to act out changes in relationships and living arrangements. Write and illustrate stories. Read books about family transitions. If possible, show child parent's new home prior to separation. Reassure child that the family transition is not his/her fault and that he/she is loved.
10. Set clear limits and reinforce child for positive behavior. Communicate with other parent to encourage consistency. Expect regressions (baby talk, disturbed sleep, thumb sucking, bedwetting, and tantrums, especially when he/she changes households. Maintain limits while responding with patience and understanding.
11. Avoid initiating major changes (toilet training, switching from crib to bed, child care) during initial period of adjustment to the family transition.

Elementary School Aged Child Developmental Stage

1. Child's self concept, self-worth, and competence develops from verbal (what is said) and non verbal (behavioral) messages received from parents.
2. Child tends to be egocentric (self-centered) and assumes responsibility/blame for events beyond his control.
3. Child begins to measure self by similarity to peers.
4. Younger elementary school-aged child continues through Erikson's "Age of Initiative," as he develops the ability to take on and tackle new tasks. Parental encouragement is critical.
5. Older elementary school-aged child enters Erikson's "Age of Industry." Child develops skills and consequently a sense of competence as he becomes involved and productive in a variety of situations (school, athletics, scouts, performing arts, arts and crafts, etc.)

6. This is an important time for sex role identification. Child continues to model self after same sex parent and internalize societal and parental views regarding sex role behavior and the value of each gender.
7. As the child's academic program becomes increasingly complex and demanding, it requires concentration, organizational skills, completion of homework, parental supervision and assistance. Hyperactivity, attention deficit disorder and learning disabilities begin to emerge, affecting school performance.
8. Child remains dependent upon parent to provide for physical safety and sense of security.

Child is active, curious, sometimes mischievous, able to do simple projects (cooking, crafts) and play outside independently, with parent or other adult checking on child periodically and available for emergencies.

9. Child is increasingly aware of own and parents' vulnerability to illness, injury, death. Child fears intruders, injury to self or parents, loss of one or both parents.
10. Child derives a sense of security from a predictable schedule of activities and contact with each parent.
11. Child is increasingly aware of socially acceptable, right and wrong behaviors. Child needs consistent reinforcement of rules, expectation and consequences to reinforce appropriate behavior and self-control.
12. Parents continue to be primary source of love/nurture. Younger elementary school-aged child, who has just begun to establish ties with peers, is especially dependent upon parents for nurture and companionship.
13. Child develops capacity for empathy: to feel for, care for others. Younger elementary school children may exhibit behavior reflective of empathy but be unable to conceptualize and articulate their concern.
14. "Age of Chums" (Sullivan) or best friends. Peer relationships serve as forerunners to intimate relationships in adult life, alleviate loneliness and provide a sense of belonging. Older elementary school-aged child may develop strong attachments and a preference for playing with specific children.
15. Sibling relationships provide the child with a sense of closeness and security. Older elementary school aged child needs increasing amounts of time alone to pursue independent interests and activities. Child strives for parental recognition of identity, separate from siblings, fostered by one to one parent-child time and parental recognition of unique attributes.

Impact of Family Transition

1. Parent may be overburdened or preoccupied with personal concerns and may see child as a reminder of former partner and failed relationship. Parent may withdraw from child, be impatient or critical. Child who receives negative messages may see self as bad, unworthy, unlovable.
2. Child may assume responsibility for parental separation or parental distress. Child may experience self-blame and guilt, contributing to negative self-concept.
3. Child may see self and family as different and therefore inferior.
4. Parent's absorption in family transition concerns may prevent him/her from encouraging child's efforts, thus hindering the development of a sense of initiative.
5. Child's involvement in activities may be interrupted or limited by moves to a new location, financial constraints, lack of transportation, or moves between parents' homes. Child may be handicapped in the development of skills, with a diminished sense of productivity and competence. Child may also experience boredom and apathy. Boredom may be particularly problematic at home of non-residential parent.
6. Same sex parent may exhibit negative behavior (aggression, submission) providing negative model for child.

Parent may communicate negative attitudes toward opposite sex ("Men are not to be trusted"; "Women are hysterical"). Child may incorporate negative views about gender or specifically about self.

Parent may be marginally involved with child or absent. Child may lack same sex role model.

7. Child may focus energy and attention on family problems with diminished energy and concentration available for schoolwork.

Distressed child with physical symptoms (headaches, stomachaches) may leave class or miss school, interrupting schoolwork. Overburdened parent may be unavailable to supervise homework and monitor progress.

Chaotic lifestyle may interfere with child's ability to complete schoolwork and develop appropriate work habits at home.

If child moves between households during school week, there may be lack of cooperation between parents, with one parent failing to support child's educational needs (e.g. ensure completion of homework). Messages, schoolwork may get lost in the process of moving between households.

Learning disabilities may be undiagnosed if child attends multiple schools, and learning disability, hyperactivity or Attention Deficit Disorder may be incorrectly attributed to child's response to family change.

8. Child's safety may be at risk due to the following: Parent may be absent due to work, school, social or other activities; may leave child unattended and or in charge of younger sibling.

Child may be alone with parent with history of poorly controlled anger, physical abuse, alcohol abuse, drinking and driving, or who exhibits poor judgment and is incapable of meeting child's needs. Child is unprotected by second parent.

Parents may engage in physical conflict in child's presence.

9. With heightened sense of own and parents' vulnerability, child may feel overwhelmed and anxious but may fail to express discomfort. Child may become more fearful (especially at night), have nightmares, may resist separation from parent seen as providing safety and security, and may resist visitation.

Child may be preoccupied with parents' safety and well-being, concerned about parental loss. Child may wonder: "Who will take care of me?"

Child exposed to parental discussion of financial concerns may worry: "Will we have enough money, food, a home, etc."

10. With disruption of family traditions, schedule, and routines, life becomes unpredictable. Child wonders "Where will I be? Who will pick me up? When will I see my mom/dad?" Child experiences confusion and anxiety.

11. Child may experience disruption in routine, rules, expectations and consequences.

Tired, guilt-ridden parent may become lax and inconsistent.

Inconsistencies may exist between parents. If parents fail to support each other's rules, expectations and consequences, child may manipulate parents.

Parent may model socially unacceptable behavior (poor anger control, aggression).

Child may exhibit diminished self-control, regression, aggression.

Above conditions may lead to a pattern of negative interaction between parent and child, where child pushes limits and parent is frequently angry. This negatively impacts the child's development of self-control and the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Child may experience anxiety and guilt over poor self-control and anxiety due to parents' failure to provide external control.

12. Parent occupied with work, school, social relationships etc., may withdraw attention from child. Non-residential parent may maintain inconsistent or inadequate contact with child and fail to enter into child's world of school, friends, activities.

Child may experience profound loss, loneliness, sadness or depression. Child may worry about loss of contact with parent or believe he is not loved or cared about. Sense of loss may reappear at time of transition from one parent to another or when parent enters new relationship.

13. Child is aware of parental distress related to family transition. Child may experience sadness and worry and attempt to take care of parent, sometimes sacrificing own needs. Child may experience loyalty conflicts. Child may enter into an alliance with one parent seen as the victim, angrily shutting out the second parent.
14. Loss of contact with special friends and general isolation from peers may result from moves to a new neighborhood, or parent's inability/unwillingness to host child's friends and provide transportation. Child may experience heightened sense of loss and loneliness.

Child may act out anger and need for control in peer relationships, alienating peers and increasing sense of isolation. Child may develop dysfunctional relationship patterns.

15. Sibling relationships may be a source of empathy and support and may alleviate loneliness in period following the family transition.

Sibling alliance may be weakened by a heightened level of tension and conflict between siblings who are together excessively and/or poorly supervised. Older elementary school aged-child who is given excessive responsibility for care of a younger sibling may feel overwhelmed and resentful.. Siblings may use each other as targets to express anger. Parent responsible for children may fail to spend individual time with child to encourage child's individual interests and strengths. Child may compete with sibling to establish a unique (and favored) identity in the eyes of the parent.

Helping Your Elementary School Aged Child Adjust to Family Transitions

1. View your child as an individual with unique strengths and weaknesses rather than as a reflection of his/her other parent. Focus on problem behaviors without condemning the child or alluding to the other parent (e.g. say: "I am disappointed that you were dishonest with me" rather than "You are a liar like your father.")

2. Let your child know that that he/she is an object of love and affection. Communicate verbally through assurances of love, and non-verbally by holding and hugging. Set aside time, ideally each day, to spend with the child on a one to one basis, exclusive of new spouse, romantic friends or the child's siblings. Read a story, take a walk, play a game, do a craft project, etc. This will reassure the child of his/her important place in your life, foster intimacy and create an atmosphere in which meaningful communication can occur.
3. If you or your child's other parent behave in ways which are hurtful to the child, acknowledge the inappropriateness of the behavior. This will validate the child's perceptions and feelings and prevent the child from blaming himself. For example, you may say: "I am sorry that your dad didn't come to see you this weekend. It was not responsible of him to call at the last minute. I can understand how disappointed and frustrated you must feel;" or "If I am irritable, it's not your fault... I love you very much... I'm just having a hard time."
4. Provide the child with a calendar so that he/she can visualize his/her schedule with each parent. Adhere to the schedule except as discussed with the child.
5. Maintain contact between visits by phoning, writing letters, or exchanging audio tapes. Understand that the responsibility may largely fall into the hands of the parent. The child may wish to speak for only a few minutes and may call less frequently than the parent. Tell the child when you will be out of town and how he/she (or his other parent) may reach you if necessary.
6. Develop strategies to ease the transition from the home of one parent to the other. Allow your child time alone if he/she desires or spend some quiet, unstructured time with your child upon his return. Encourage your child to talk about the pain evoked by repeated separations, difficulties experienced during time with the other parent or other matters of concern. Allow the child time to acclimate, without thrusting him/her into immediate action. This may require having the child arrive at your home an hour earlier than originally planned.
7. If you are a non-residential parent, establish an area (a room or part of a room) where the child's personal belongings will remain and will not be disturbed by other family members. Allow your child to assist in setting up this area.
8. Provide repeated, simple explanations of the reasons for the family transition. Reassure the child that he/she was not to blame.
 - If there were certain aspects of the relationship which were particularly dysfunctional, explain this to the child in simple terms so that he can begin to build an understanding of the dynamics of relationships and distinguish between healthy and unhealthy behaviors. For example, you may say: "Your mom

worked very long hours and was away on business a great deal. We stopped talking to one another about important things. I felt very lonely.”

- If you and your former partner have different interpretations of the problem leading to your separation, explain this to your child and reassure him that he need not decide if one parent is “telling the truth.”
 - Read books about family transitions, draw pictures, or write stories to enhance your child’s understanding. For younger children, use dolls, action figures or puppets.
 - Tell your child about positive and pleasurable parts of your relationship and family life; share stories, photographs and memorabilia.
9. Support the child’s involvement in meaningful activities and friendships:
- If moving to a new home, select a neighborhood with many children and opportunities for extracurricular activities. Attempt to remain in close proximity to your child’s other parent to minimize disruption to the child’s life.
 - Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children at least two or three times a week. Younger elementary school children will usually be satisfied with opportunities to play with children in general and will not necessarily discriminate on the basis of gender and age of specific children. Older elementary school children will be more selective and strongly prefer the company of specific friends. Therefore, for older elementary aged children it will be important to provide transportation for your child to visit friends, host your child’s friends and allow them to accompany your child for visitation or outings. It will be important to adjust your schedule of contact with your child to accommodate his/her social and recreational needs.
 - Attend your child’s school and athletic events and performances.
 - Help your child inform his other parent of important events.
 - Share hobbies with your child (e.g. carpentry, arts and crafts, skating).
10. Provide opportunities for your child to associate with other children and families experiencing family transitions through groups for children, community organizations or friendships to foster a sense of belonging.
11. Allow siblings to have a balance of time together and apart. Avoid treating siblings as a unit at all times. Foster individual interests and relationships for each. Allow each child to have individual belongings and personal space. Avoid delegating responsibility for younger siblings to older elementary school aged children.
12. If your child lacks a meaningful relationship with one parent, provide substitute role models (scout leaders, athletic coaches, family friends or relatives). Avoid negative generalizations about adults of the opposite sex and negative correlation between the child and his same sex parent. Convey positive values of each gender to your child.

13. If your child's safety and well-being are endangered during the time he spends with his other parent, confront the parent directly and seek legal support as well. When indicated, limit child's contact, eliminate overnights, or request supervised visitation. Encourage the child to discuss the problem openly with you to ensure his safety without condemning the parent whose behavior is in question. Help the child to develop coping strategies (e.g. a list of people child may call in the event of emergency, a quarter for phone call, etc.)
14. Teach your child beginning steps in self-reliance (simple cooking projects, selecting own clothes, helping to decorate a new room, caring for a pet). Avoid burdening the child with excessive responsibilities, large numbers of chores, or care of a younger sibling, which interferes with the child's ability to pursue age appropriate activities and relationships. Always provide for childcare in your absence.
15. If your child is clingy and reluctant to separate, be supportive but encourage the child to pursue normal activities. If your child is fearful at night, help the child to develop coping strategies (listening to music, holding a pet, reading, playing quietly). Sit with and read or talk to the child at bedtime and comfort him briefly during the night. Avoid sharing the bed with the child. Reward the child's successes.
16. Avoid dwelling on your financial, personal, emotional or physical concerns with the child or within the child's hearing. Communicate the message: "we have resources... we will make it... this is a grown up problem and not something for you to be concerned about." Reassure your child that you are capable of providing for his safety and well being.
17. Encourage your child to express concerns about losing you as a primary caretaker. Discuss options for care of the child in the event of your death. Reassure the child that he will be cared for.
18. Advise the school of changes in your child's life. Communicate with teachers, administrators and counselors to monitor your child's academic and behavioral progress in school. Formulate a plan to support your child and reevaluate several times a year.
19. Provide a specific time and place for your child to complete school work. Be available or arrange for a competent adult to provide supervision and assistance as needed. Avoid placing a strong emphasis on your child's school performance during times of family stress. Reassure your child that a temporary "slip" in schoolwork is common following a family transition.

20. To foster the child's development of self-control, create a stable and predictable environment:
- Establish rituals and traditions (e.g. regular family meal times, weekly family meetings).
 - Select a few important target behaviors (e.g. control of physical aggression, clearing the table, making bed) and make expectations, rewards and consequences clear.
 - Carry out consequences consistently but do not be punitive or harsh in response to the child's failures.
 - Model self control for your child. Avoid use of physical punishment and avoid shouting matches. Do not respond to the child's threats with counter-threats (e.g. when child says "I'll show you, I'm going to live with daddy" avoid responding with "I'll pack your bags").
 - Expect that your child may temporarily regress (slip back to earlier behaviors) in response to the family change. If discipline has been inconsistent or lax the child will need time to comply with your new expectations.
21. Recognize these suggestions as guidelines from which to pick and choose but also recognize that your energy has its limitations. Don't be discouraged or hard on yourself when you cannot be the perfect parent—this is a difficult time for you as well as your children!

The Middle School Aged Child Stages of Development

1. Middle school aged child begins process of separation; tests relationships outside immediate family, holds peer relationships and activities in high regard. Child is still dependent on parents for mobility, information and support.
2. Although more able than younger child to use higher order thinking skills and abstract ideas, middle school aged children are often still concrete thinkers and view situations as all black or white.
3. In the middle school aged child, feelings of self-worth greatly influenced by peer acceptance. Feelings of belonging and being the same as others are important to the adolescent.
4. With physical, intellectual, social and psychological maturation, many new situations and people enter the adolescent's life. This often leaves the child feeling overwhelmed and disorganized. Academic curriculum involves more abstract thinking and increased demands on student responsibilities. At this time, parents may become aware of learning disabilities.
5. Changes (including internal growth, physical development, new outside demands and experiences) often leave adolescent feeling like he is on an "emotional roller coaster."

6. Child is venturing out more, exploring further from home, acquiring knowledge of expanding world and differences. He/she may test new or different ideas and values, challenging long held family values and beliefs.
7. Adolescent who witnesses the deterioration of a relationship with either overt hostility or a “surprise” betrayal may be left with a negative view and/or fear of relationships. If parents are dating at the same time as their adolescents, competition, jealousy and confusion may result.
8. Adolescent begins to integrate work, school, friends and family. May model various roles and test out many behaviors.
9. Despite a growing sense of independence, judgment is still unreliable at times, and heavily influenced by peers. The middle school child is unable to consistently make sound, thoughtful decisions.

Impact of Family Transition

1. Sudden loss of sense of family may create much pain, leaving adolescent preoccupied. He/she may have difficulty participating in extracurricular activities due to lack of transportation or not knowing how to access activities without parental help.
2. The child may tend to blame or find fault with one parent. He/she is easily confused when more than one reason is given by parents for the family transition. Younger adolescents feel caught in the middle at times, and feel pressure to choose sides. They are especially hurt by the loss of their singular vision of “ideal family.”
3. With many changes taking place, adolescents feel very self-conscious and are easily threatened by risk of feeling “exposed” with peers. Family transitions may make adolescent feel different from peers, and less than perfect. Some may hide the fact that their parents live apart or feel embarrassed that they can no longer participate in as many activities because of lack of money, transportation, or increased responsibilities at home.
4. Anxiety over the family transition may exacerbate child’s disorganization. In school, students may feel distracted or find it more difficult to concentrate. If adolescent goes back and forth between households, he/she may “forget” books and or assignments in the transitions. Adolescent may also struggle with differences in household rules. Teacher conferences should involve input/participation from both parents.
5. Youngster’s feelings about the family transition may vary dramatically, with the adolescent seemingly at peace one day and in a rage or in tears the next.
6. Conflicts in both households over different expectations and behaviors escalate. Adolescent may take advantage of differences between households, try to evade rules, or test limits.

7. Child is developing a sense of self in relationships. In part, he/she experiences self through projecting self onto others.
8. When parents separate, roles often become confused and expectations unclear. If one parent is involved in an unhealthy activity (substance abuse, family violence, etc.), negative role modeling may result and the adolescent may “test” these behaviors himself. With parents working longer or absent, there may be a lack of healthy, positive role models, and the child may feel disconnected.
9. Because of time pressures, parents sometimes welcome opportunity to leave adolescent unsupervised for longer periods of time. Adolescent less likely to verbalize feeling apprehensive or anxious, for fear of being “childlike.” Left unsupervised, the adolescent risks getting into trouble or acting out behaviors like partying, drinking, etc.

Helping Middle School Aged Child Adjust to Family Transitions

1. Understand how important it is for your child to have a sense of belonging and feel the “same” as others in his/her peer group.
 - discuss and help to arrange peer activities
 - find resources available in the community for this age group
 - join a carpool or ask a friend to help provide transportation
2. Include adolescent in establishing schedules, vacation plans or visits. Be as flexible as possible and incorporate his/her activities and social commitments into your planning time together.
3. Know your child’s academic program and teachers and keep informed about his/her progress.
 - inform the school counselor and your child’s teachers about the family transition
 - attend back to school night to meet teachers
 - arrange for conferences if you and/or child have concerns
 - ask school for help in supporting/helping student in areas of concern
4. Make time to totally focus on child in an unconditionally loving manner. Middle school age kids frequently say their parents forget that they’re kids because they’re older and taller, but that they still need hugs, praise (e.g. “I’m glad you’re you”) and time with parent.
5. Communicate and spend time with your child. (see *Communicating With Your Teenager*)
6. Work with your child to establish a structure for school work which includes location for study, subjects, and opportunities for parental oversight. Make sure youngster has all materials needed for study.

7. Get to know your child's friends/parents. Discuss curfews, acceptable places to go. Encourage get-togethers at your home.
8. Discuss and establish clear expectations with adolescent about curfews and household responsibilities in your home. Determine consequences that you can follow through with when adolescent is in your home.

The Older Adolescent Phases of Development

1. The older adolescent slowly leaves home and separates emotionally from family. Feelings of independence grow.
2. Many changes occur in the adolescent's life: physiological, sexual, social, and emotional; he/she focuses on self and own needs.
3. Older adolescent has strong needs to belong, be accepted by peer group, feel "sameness."
4. Adolescent weaves in and out of family system, requiring its support in time of need, such as when rejected by others outside family. May regress and has erratic maturity level.
5. Older adolescent has ability to use abstract reasoning and question consistency in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors.
6. Adolescents may not think before acting or know how to make appropriate decisions; need rules, limitations, discipline to maintain a clear focus and integrate various facets of their growth.
7. Older adolescent experiences self through projected others in relationships; may seek out relationships similar to those experienced in family.
8. Older adolescent integrates work, school, peer and family roles.

Impact of Family Transition

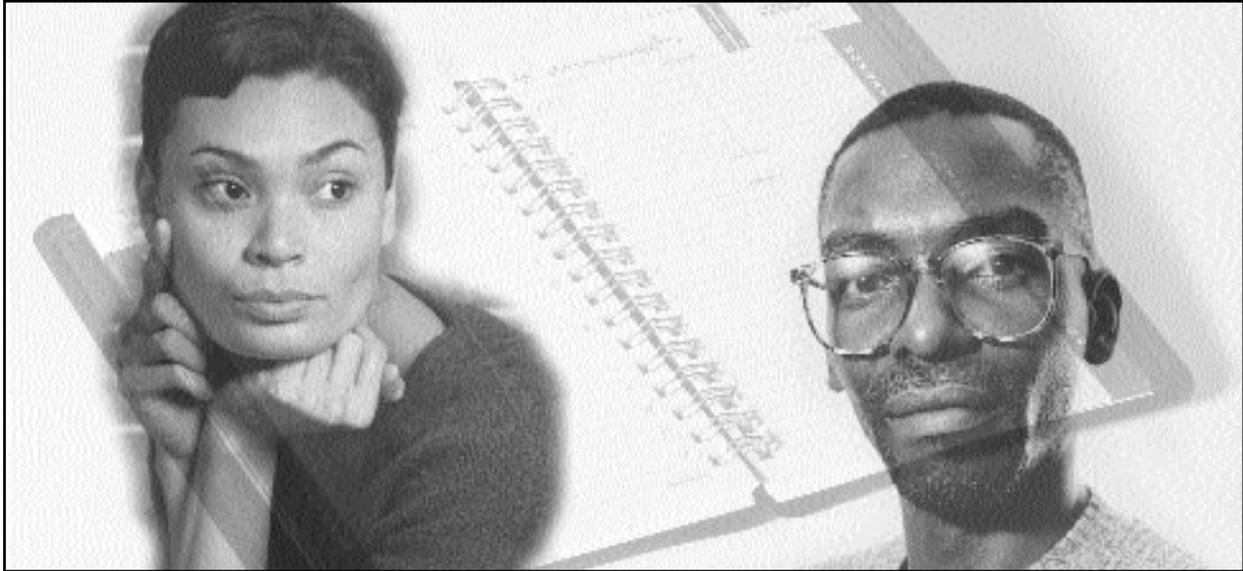
1. The older adolescent experiences loss of both a parent and an intact family. He/she is pulled back into the family and loses independent space. He/she may desire a closer relationship with the parent he/she has not seen frequently.
2. With family transitions, focus is taken away from child; focus is on family and external changes. He/she may lack role models.
3. Because of family transitions, older adolescent may have less money, fewer activities, and may feel different from peers. Older adolescents begin to establish closer relationships.

4. Parents may be in crisis, focusing on their own needs. There may be role reversals in terms of parent depending on adolescent and expecting adolescent to take former partner's place.
5. Higher level of thinking skills enables adolescents to question their parents about relationships:
 - If you love me, why did you do this to me?
 - If you love me, why don't you see me?
 - Why were you in a relationship if you were just going to end up separating?
6. There may be a lack of rules, discipline, and follow through; adolescent may become more independent and responsible.
7. Older adolescent may compete with parent in relationships. May have a negative view or fear of relationships.
8. Older adolescent may experience role confusion; may have negative role models or a lack of role models; may feel disconnected.

Helping Your Older Adolescent Adjust to Family Transitions

1. Since older adolescents are able to understand more, they may ask questions that they have had in the past about their parents' relationship. Answer questions honestly without speaking negatively about the other parent. To help youngster grasp a longitudinal view of the relationship, discuss its history, including positive, loving times. Discuss relationships — both yours and your child's — to help him/her understand healthy ways of relating and how you learned from your experiences.
2. Make time to totally focus on your child in an unconditionally loving manner. These kids frequently say that their parents forget that they're kids because they're older or taller, but they still need hugs, praise (e.g. "I'm glad you're you") and time with parents.
3. Communicate and catch your youngster when you can (see *Communicating With Your Teenager*).
4. Demonstrate that it's all right for your adolescent to go on with his life by seeking adult support for yourself, counseling or other needed services when appropriate.
5. Discuss rules and consequences regarding curfews, driving, schoolwork, parties and other areas of your adolescent's life that require parental supervision. Be able to enforce rules and follow through with consequences.

6. When one parent is not involved with your child, try to have friends or family members of the same sex as child model appropriate behavior.
7. Permit adolescents to decide how close they want to be with parents and parent's adult friends. Expect courteous or respectful behavior and interactions but don't force closeness. Use discretion in dating and when to involve youngster.
8. Help youngster explore and make decisions about the future. Learn what resources are available at the school and make use of them. Search for mentors from different sources.
9. Get together with other families to reinforce your sense of family.
10. Be flexible; modify time with adolescent based on his/her request. Don't force your child to have a relationship with the other parent, but support that relationship if youngster wants to be closer.



Chapter Four

Parenting Agreements: An Overview

As they pass through each developmental stage, children have needs which must be met for optimum mental and emotional health. Parents are rightly concerned about the self-esteem needs, interpersonal relationships, and intellectual development of their children.

It is absolutely critical that parents who are experiencing a family transition learn to become business partners in a respectful parenting relationship. Both parents — and the child — will benefit from such a relationship. In addition, parents can learn how to convert what has been taught at the seminars into a legal agreement.

Developing a Constructive Co-parenting Relationship

1. Think of your relationship as a cordial business relationship: you are in the business of raising your children. The amount of control, level of involvement and specific functions of each parent will change through the years as the needs of each parent and child change.
2. There is no reason why parents must be friends or present the illusion of friendship to the children. A cordial and cooperative relationship is sufficient. Attempting to interact as friends may be confusing to the children as well as to one or both of the parents as each struggles to come to grips with the reality of the separation.

3. Complement one another and do not work at cross purposes. Communicate about the needs of your children and how each of you is functioning to meet these needs. We suggest that you communicate:
 - regularly; at a preappointed, mutually convenient time
 - apart from the children; not at pick up or delivery time, not within kids' earshot, perhaps after their bedtime or from work
 - about the children; remain child-focused
 - when calm (take a break if you start to feel upset, since this may interfere with constructive communication)
 - in writing if necessary

4. Important topics for parent-parent communication
 - health
 - education
 - recreation
 - day care /child care
 - emotional concerns
 - financing purchases or special activities and programs
 - parent requesting a change of schedule to meet parent's needs
 - parent requesting a change of schedule to meet child's needs if child is too young to discuss with parent (usually up to age 8 or 9)
 - child's schedule of activities and events at which child desires other parent's presence
 - safety with other parent

5. Examples of topics best handled through parent-child communication: (beginning with children of older elementary school age)
 - child wants to change visitation to meet own needs
 - child wants a special activity with parent
 - child has a problem with a parent but it does not involve a question of health or safety

6. Suggestions for establishing a cordial relationship:
 - Make requests and not demands. If you need to change your parenting schedule, request a change. Do not **inform** your child's other parent.
 - Do not enter the other parent's house without permission. You are not living there, even if the home is legally yours.
 - Call before coming by or allowing your child to enter the house when not originally scheduled to do so.
 - Let your child and former partner know where you can be reached for emergencies. Check in for messages.
 - Be on time for commitments to your children, for pick up and drop off times.

- Be aware that your former partner may not be in the same “place” as you are in response to your family transition. You may feel very comfortable entering your former partner’s home, helping yourself to a drink and engaging in conversation. This may not be comfortable for your child’s other parent. Be sensitive to this. If **you** are not comfortable with this, you have a right to set limits. Say so in a kind but assertive manner.
 - Do not call excessively. This can interfere with the life of your child’s other parent and breed resentment.
 - Speak of and treat other parent with respect. Don’t ask child questions or bad-mouth other parent. Don’t put child in middle.
 - Work with other parent based on child needs. Try to communicate about daily routines, structure, how time will be supervised and free time will be spent. Enforce consequences other parent has initiated or explain why not.
7. If you are treated inconsiderately be assertive without trying to punish your child’s other parent. Your goal is to take care of yourself and your child. For example, if your child’s other parent is supposed to visit on Wednesday and is unable to, but then asks to visit on Thursday, you may assertively respond that this is not compatible with your schedule. Your goal, however, is not to hurt your child’s other parent by preventing contact with your child.
 8. Be fair. Follow the “golden rule” rather than “an eye for an eye”. Think of how you would like to be treated under the same circumstances. It may increase the likelihood that you will be treated similarly. For example, meet your former partner half way rather than insisting that he/she be entirely responsible for transportation at the time of visitation.
 9. Take responsibility for your own behavior even if you are not comfortable with the behavior of your former partner. Even though your former partner may not change his or her behavior, you can behave in a mature manner and avoid retribution and conflict escalation. In this way, you will be setting a positive example for your child.
 10. Establish safety rules for child in all situations and help prepare them in case of emergency. For example: What to do when child is alone and someone calls for parent; when a relative is drinking and is supposed to transport child; when someone is behaving inappropriately.
 11. Children have enough love for each parent when they are loved and respected; it’s not necessary to compete for a child’s love.

Parenting Arrangements: When Substance Abuse is A Problem

There is a certain amount of awkwardness or strain when a child, whose parents have recently separated, is expected to spend time with a parent he/she may not have spent much time with or felt close to. In this situation, tell the child that it is O.K. to feel a little uncomfortable at first, and that it might help to let the parent know how he/she feels and what he/she enjoys doing.

This awkwardness or discomfort, however, is not what we are referring to when children express fears about the unpredictable behaviors of a substance abusing parent. If there has been a history of drug or alcohol use by one parent, you may have special concerns about leaving your child(ren) in the sole care of that parent.

For example, concerning physical safety of the child(ren):

- Do children know how to phone you or another neighbor/relative/friend if they feel unsafe?
- Have you communicated to your child's other parent that the child may not travel with a parent who has been drinking?
- Have you helped your child practice ways in which he/she might tell that parent how it makes them feel if she or she has been drinking?

If a parent's alcohol or drug use has not reached the level of addiction, he/she may be able to change that behavior. This may occur if the child can directly share his/her feelings with the parent, and together they can work out an acceptable arrangement.

However, with active addiction or alcoholism, this strategy will not be helpful, and may frustrate both child and parent. It is especially important to help youngsters distinguish between when it is appropriate for them to directly share their feelings with a parent, and when their non-abusing parent needs to communicate with the abusing parent. If you are concerned that the other parent may be struggling with addiction or alcoholism, you will need to communicate with that parent directly in order to protect your child's safety.

Recognizing the Changes

While still in the family, the substance abusing parent's behavior was probably handled in a variety of ways to try to lessen the pain for the rest of the family. Denial of the problem might have been demonstrated in family members minimizing how bad things were, rationalizing that parents were allowed certain leeway, hiding the behavior from others, or one parent picking up more responsibilities to make up for the losses of the other parent. Children learn directly or indirectly that the substance abusing parent can't be relied upon, isn't always to be believed, or gets easily angered because "that's just how he/she is."

With a family transition, children may fear being asked to suddenly trust this parent to care for their needs, to know what to do, and to a responsible parent. The child no longer has the other parent to help him/her understand some of the behaviors, requests, and/or expectations.

If In Trouble, Dial 911

Just as it is hard for an adult to confront a substance abuser's inappropriate behavior effectively, it is even more difficult for a young person. If a parent is taking a child to bars or traveling with the child to and from adult parties with alcohol, the child is rightfully scared about his/her own well being. Older children may more readily express angry feelings, embarrassment at parental conduct, or the risks of driving with an impaired parent. Older siblings may "mimic" the over responsible role that the other parent once played, and pick up many extra responsibilities of running the household — cleaning, cooking, watching younger siblings, "covering" for the substance abusing parent.

Children who spend time with a substance abusing parent should know that when they are scared, they should call another adult. This may be a supportive neighbor, grandparent, or the other parent. In any emergency, such as needing a ride home when it's not safe to drive with the parent, the child can dial 911 and explain the situation. The assumption needs to favor the child's safety, and both the child and each parent should be clearly informed of that.

Talking Parent-to-Parent

As with other suggestions about co-parenting conversations, pick a mutually agreed upon time and place, out of earshot of children. Limit the amount of time, and stick to a single topic, in this case, the child's needs when one parent is actively using drugs or alcohol. Use "I" statements to express concerns, not accusatory "you" statements.

For example, "I am concerned that Sally gets frightened and worried when she has to put herself to bed when your friends come over and get loud and drink beer. You are, of course, entitled to entertain any way you'd like, and you should be able to spend time with Sally, but not the two things together."

or

"Bobby has told you and me both that it upsets him when he can't wake you up on the middle of the night if he has a bad dream. He's afraid to fall back to sleep and ends up cranky the next day."

or

"Freddie is not old enough to be left alone and should not be going into bars with you in the evenings."

Parenting is like lifeguard duty, where you are always ready just in case an emergency arises. Drinking any more than one drink an hour or ingesting any mind altering chemical jeopardizes any parent's ability to assess and respond to a child's crisis. It slows reaction time, impairs judgment and keeps one from making sound parenting decisions even about routine things, like bedtimes or mealtimes.

For these reasons, we strongly discourage an "on-duty" parent from using drugs or alcohol when children are around. Co-parenting agreements may include a designated

driver to and from parties where a parent has been drinking, making alternative overnight arrangements (with a family member, the child's friend, etc.) if there will be drinking or drugs, supervised visitation and/or limited overnight arrangements. Setting limits where the child's needs are concerned is not intended to directly or indirectly change the substance abusing parent's decision to continue the use of drugs or alcohol. It will simply prohibit that use while in the presence of the child.

For more information and resources to learn more about signs and symptoms of substance abuse, treatment and support, contact your local health department for a list of resources in your area.

Mental Illness of a Parent

Before the family transition, if a parent was coping with a mental illness, there was another parent in the home to help the children understand and accept the other parent's illness. Like other problems in the family such as substance abuse, children and parents may have learned adaptive roles that helped in the former home situation but may not be adaptive in the present. For example, if a parent was suffering from clinical depression and was not being treated, his/her job performance and relationships may have been impaired. The youngster may have learned to stay out of that parent's way or cater to that parent while suppressing his or her own needs. The parent who was psychologically healthier was there to help the child understand the parent's behavior and most importantly, to meet the child's needs. After the family transition, the other parent is no longer around to protect a youngster and the child may feel scared and not know how to react to the mentally ill parent.

Helping Children Cope With A Parent Who Has A Mental Illness

1. Communicate with the other parent about appropriate and responsible parenting required; the need, if appropriate, for that parent to be under the care of a competent mental health professional and follow through in a consistent fashion with the clinician's recommendation.
2. Build in some flexibility to the parenting arrangement so that if a parent is having a difficult time psychologically, the other parent might have the child with him/her for a longer period of time, or may agree to other ways to support the parent-child relationship.
3. Children need to be told about their parent's illness. For example, children need to know that a parent who is clinically depressed may be irritable, may withdraw or be profoundly sad. Having more accurate information can help the youngster feel less frightened and reinforce the fact that the child is not responsible for the parent's behavior. The child can also learn to obtain other adult support for him/herself. Youngsters often feel guilty that they aren't as involved as they think they ought to be. It is important to reassure the child that his/her feelings are normal.

4. Be a sounding board for your child. Without badmouthing the other parent, empathize with the child's difficulty and discuss coping strategies. For example, a child might complain that it is depressing at the other parent's home because there is little talk and/or no shared activities. You might ask how the child feels, what would help, and how the child can communicate to the parent.

Discipline - A Constructive Approach For Parents

While we recognize and respect each parent's set of values and cultural differences, we must support the law of this country. Parents bring many different styles of parenting that are based on their cultural, religious and familial values and beliefs. Single parents who are going through a family transition have a tremendous number of stresses in their lives. It is extremely important to provide guidance to children in constructive ways and obtain adult support to help ease some of the stresses.

As alternatives to violence, the following guidelines for disciplining children may be helpful:

Tips for Parents

1. Understand what is "normal" behavior for your child's age and stage of development. If we expect more than a child of a particular age is capable of, we're asking the impossible and possibly punishing a child for something he/she is not capable of doing.
2. Discipline your children in a way that helps them learn how to behave. Sit with them beforehand and help them learn what to expect in different situations. Don't threaten them, and don't discipline while you're still too angry —take time to cool off first.
3. Know your limits and what triggers your anger. Remove yourself if you can't control anger. Give your youngster the same option. Agree to go back to discuss the disagreement with your child when you are both ready to talk in a civil, respectable manner.
4. Seek support and feedback from friends and relatives. How do they discipline their children? Attend classes with other parents that teach specific parenting skills.
5. Give yourself some time away from children to nurture yourself and gain a fresh perspective.

The National Family Resiliency Center staff is including information about child abuse laws to help parents further understand their role as responsible parents.

Definitions

1. **Child abuse** means:

- a. Physical injury, not necessarily visible, sustained by a child as a result of cruel or inhumane treatment or as a result of a malicious act or acts, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened by it, by a parent, adoptive parent, household or family member, or custodian, including any stepparent, foster parent, or guardian;
- b. Any sexual abuse, meaning an act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation, whether physical injuries are sustained or not, by a parent, adoptive parent, household or family member, or custodian, including any stepparent, foster parent, or guardian.

2. **Child neglect** means:

- a. a significant physical or mental harm or injury threatened to or being suffered by a child as a result of conditions created by the absence of the parent, guardian or custodian, or by the failure of that person to give proper care and attention to the child and the child's problems under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened by it.

The above definitions were provided by the Protective Service Department of the Department of Social Service.

Appendix

Suggested Readings for Adults

On Relationships:

Bray, James and Kelly, John, Step Families - Love, Marriage and Parenting in the First Decade, 1998. A detailed guide to stepfamily life based on a longitudinal study by an expert in the field.

Block, Joel, D. Step-Living for Teens: Getting Along with Step-parents, Parents and Siblings, 2001.

Gottman, John, Why Marriages Succeed or Fail: And How You Can Make Yours Last, 1995. Identifies communication styles and patterns and suggests healthy patterns for healthier relationships.

Lusterman, Don-David, Infidelity: A Survival Guide, 1998. A comprehensive text on how and why infidelity occurs and how to begin the recovery process.

Spring, Janis, After the Affair: Healing the Pain and Rebuilding Trust After a Partner Has Been Unfaithful, 1997. Insight into the issues for both persons in a relationship in which one has been unfaithful to the other.

On Parenting:

Apter, Terri, You Don't Really Know Me - Why Mother's and Daughters Fight and How Both Can Win, 2005. Surviving adolescence and the mother-daughter relationship.

Bode, Janet, For Better or Worse: A Guide to Surviving Divorce for Preteens and Their Families, 2001.

Garon, Risa; Whitfill, The Honorable Cypert; Leasure, The Honorable Diane; Murphy, John, Esq.; Richlin, Margaret, Esq.; Rogers, Kathryn; Sigai, Francine; Tewey, Elizabeth; Stop! In the Name of Love For Your Children. Co-authored by the executive director and co-founder of National Family Resiliency Center, Inc., this book helps parents to identify and practice healthy co-parenting behaviors. Available at www.divorceabc.com and amazon.com.

Garon, Risa and Mandell, Barbara, Talking with Your Children About Separation and Divorce. Authored by the executive director and co-founder of our center, this book provides a sense of hope and support for children and families, as well as concrete suggestions on ways to express feelings, adjust to changes in family relationships, and build a problem-solving approach to many divorce-related concerns. Available at www.divorceabc.com. and amazon.com.

Kirshenbaum, Mira and Foster, Charles, Parent/Teen Breakthrough: The Relationship Approach, 1991. The authors recommend tips for improving parent-adolescent communication.

Mayle, Peter, Why Are We Getting a Divorce? A Handbook Offering Reassurance, Sympathy, and Sound Advice on How to Cope with a Family in Transition, 1988.

Phelan, Thomas, 1-2-3 Magic, Effective Discipline for Children Ages 2-12, 2003. A common-sense guide to disciplining young children, based on positive reinforcements, natural consequences and consistent consequences.

Schneider and Zuckerberg, Difficult Questions Kids Ask and Are Afraid to Ask About Divorce, 1996. A frank discussion about what children want to know and need to know and how to communicate about those issues.

Turecki, Stanley, The Difficult Child, Revised 2000. A gentle, understanding and thorough guide to parenting children with more rigid temperaments.

Wolf, Anthony, Why Did you Have to Get a Divorce? When Can I get a Hamster? A Guide to Parenting Through Divorce, 1998.

On Forgiveness and Moving On:

Allison, Susan, Conscious Divorce: Ending a Marriage with Integrity: A Practical and Spiritual Guide for Moving On, 2001.

Coates, Christine, Learning From Divorce: How to Take Responsibility, Stop the Blame, and Move On, 2003.

Hendrix, Harville, Getting the Love You Want, 1988. A guide for re-newing and improving your relationship.

Hudson, Patricia O'Hanlon, You Can Get Over Divorce: A Seven Step Guide to Get on With the Rest of Your life, 1998.

Joselaw, Beth, Life Lessons - 50 Things I Learned from My Divorce, 1994

Simon, Sidney and Simon, Suzanne, Forgiveness - How To Make Peace With Your Past and Get On With Your Life, 1991

Suggested Readings for Children

Note to Parents:

The following books may be helpful to children adjusting to separation and divorce. Some children may be able to read these books independently, while others will require your assistance. In all cases, we would urge you to read the books yourselves, decide whether or not the book is appropriate for your child, and use the reading of the book as an opportunity to share thoughts and feelings with your child.

PS – Toddler/Preschool Ages
ES – Elementary School Ages
MS – Middle School Ages
HS – High School Ages

(ES) Banks, Ann. When Your Parents Get a Divorce. A Kid's Journal. 1990. An activity book for children and parents to work through together to process on feelings and coping strategies for family transitions.

(ES,MS,HS) Blume, Judy. It's Not the End of the World. 1979.

(PS, ES) Cain, Barbara. Double-Dip Feelings Stories to Help Children Understand Emotions. 2001. A book to help children understand their mixed emotions and conflicting feelings whether it be about a new arrival to the family or the first day of school

(ES) Caseley, Judith. Priscilla Twice. 1995. A young girl finds out that there are many different kinds of families even if it isn't the kind of family you want. She realizes that what makes a family is love.

(PS, ES) Coy, John. Two Old Potatoes and Me. 2003. After a young girl finds two old potatoes at her father's house, they plant and tend them to see if they will have new potatoes in the fall.

(ES, MS) Deklyn, Chuck; Schweibert, Pat. Tear Soup A Recipe for Healing After Loss. Soup is a blended creation to satisfy hunger and soothe what hurts you.

(PS, ES) Downey, Roma. Love is a Family. 2001. After feeling upset about being different, a little girl learns that all families are good and that hers is the best of all because it belongs to her.

(PS, ES, MS) Evans, Marla D. This is Me and My Two Families. 1986. An awareness scrapbook/journal for children living in Stepfamilies.

(PS, ES) Garon, Risa. Snowman: A Companion for Young Readers. This book teaches children that it is all right to grieve the loss of their family as they knew it or wished it could be. It also gives them a sense of hope about their present and future while allowing them to remember and treasure the past. This book, for younger children, is a companion book to A Kid's Guide to Separation and Divorce. Available at www.divorceabc.com and amazon.com.

(ES, MS, HS) Garon, Risa; Whitfill, The Honorable Cypert; Leasure, The Honorable Diane; Murphy, John, Esq.; Richlin, Margaret, Esq.; Rogers, Kathryn; Sigai, Francine; Tewey, Elizabeth. A Kid's Guide to Separation and Divorce. Coming to terms with divorce for children and teens means understanding the changes that have occurred and are occurring in one's family; being able to express feelings in healthy ways and learning skills to help them cope with the losses and changes in their lives. Divorce is confusing. This book also explains legal terms to children to help them better understand the legal, social and psychological process related to separation and divorce. Available at www.divorceabc.com and amazon.com.

(PS, ES) Haughton, Emma. Rainy Day. 2000. A little boy and his dad weather the storm together.

(PS, ES) Holmes, Margaret. A Terrible Thing Happened. 2000. A little raccoon deals with his feelings after seeing something traumatic to him.

(PS, ES) Levins, Sandra. Was It the Chocolate Pudding? 2006. A Story for Little Kids About Divorce.

(MS) Madison, Lynda. The Feelings Book The Care and Keeping of your Emotions. 2002. A girl's guide to dealing with her emotions, whether they're happy or sad.

(PS, ES) Masurel, Claire. Two Homes. 2001. A young boy named Alex enjoys the homes of both his parents who live apart but love Alex very much.

(PS, ES) McBratney, Sam and Jeram, Anita, Guess How Much I Love You. 1996. Parent and child bunny rabbits share the meaning of the unconditional love that exists between parents and children.

(ES) Moser, Adolph. Don't Fall Apart on Saturdays! 2000. The Children's Divorce-Survival Book.

(PS, ES) Newman, Leselea. Heather has Two Mommies 10th Anniversary Edition. 2000. A little girl describes her life in her home with her two moms.

(PS, ES) Parr, Todd. The Family Book. 2003. The Mommy Book. 2003. The Daddy Book. 2003.

(PS, ES) Penn, Audrey. The Kissing Hand. 1993. A Little Raccoon and his mother create a loving ritual to sustain them through their time apart.

(MS) Peterson, P.J. I Want Answers and a Parachute. J-Fic., 1993.

(ES,MS,HS) Prokop, Michael S. Divorce Happens to the Nicest Kids: a self-help book for children (ages 3-15), parents and counselors. 1996.

(PS, ES) Rubin, Judith A. My Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore. 2002. A Drawing Book for Children of Separated and Divorce Parents. Some things are easier to see with pictures. This book encourages children to explore their emotions through pictures and words while helping them understand their feelings.

(ES) Rogers, Fred. Divorce. J306.89R., 1996.

(MS,HS) Sachs, Marilyn. Another Day. 1997.

(ES) Schotter, Roni and Moore, Cyd, Missing Rabbit. 2002. A little girl and her bunny experience a family transition and learn how to appreciate a home with mom and a home with dad.

(PS,ES) Simon, Norma. All Kinds of Families. 1976. A tribute of love to every family configuration.

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