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> The child's efforts at mastery are strengthened when he understands the divorce as a serious and carefully considered remedy for an important problem, when the divorce appears purposeful and rationally undertaken, and indeed succeeds in bringing relief and a happier outcome for one or both parents.
>
> —Judith S. Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, *Surviving the Breakups*[1]

AT THE TIME parents raise concerns about their children, or at the time they have decided on a marital separation or divorce, it is appropriate to share information about children's needs with a couple. I often ask them if they believe there is such a thing as a healthy adjustment for children of divorce. And if there is in their hearts and minds a healthy adjustment, is there one living arrangement for the children that they believe to be better than others? Is living primarily with one parent, and visiting the other, or living equally or part of the time with each parent a better arrangement? One hopes that helping them be in touch with their biases about children's adjustments and living arrangements liberates them to listen to what you have to say about research findings and your own experience. Once they know they have biases and what they are, they are more apt to listen to you talk about your observations, experience, and research findings, rather than screening out what you are saying because it disagrees with what they believe.

Living Arrangements After Divorce

An excellent point of departure for helping parents to create appropriate postdivorce living arrangements is to brainstorm together with the mediation therapist the qualities of parenting that can make a difference in the adjustment of their children. When parents derive for themselves what their children will need, I sense that the parents will honor those requirements.

With regard to living arrangements after divorce, I indicate that I believe there are several living arrangements in which children prosper after divorce, depending upon factors such as the children's ages, temperaments, gender, and vulnerability toward experiencing loyalty conflicts between parents. Fortunately—or unfortunately, according to one's viewpoint—there seem to be no magic formulas, no rules that say all children are better off living with one parent and visiting the other, or better off living with each parent part of the time.

It is reported in Wallerstein and Blakeslees' book *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children after Divorce, Who Wins, Who Loses—and Why* [by Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989] that quality of parenting, cooperation between parents, and settling of conflicts between the two parents are important issues in children's adjustment. I suggest these issues may be even more important than the number of homes

in which the children live. I tell parents that it will not be possible to sit in their lawyer's or divorce mediator's office and design a living arrangement schedule that will guarantee adjustment and happiness for children. I tell them that, in my view, the task is infinitely more difficult than deciding where the children reside. It involves parents *being with their children*, sustaining a quality relationship with them consistently over a long period of time. It involves learning new parenting skills, and, as Wallerstein indicates, making the children a *major* priority.

Separating or divorcing parents cannot design the structure of the house—the living arrangements for the children—neglecting what goes on *within* the house for the next eight or fifteen or twenty years. In choosing which postdivorce parenting arrangement is the best for each couple, I say that, in eighteen years as a family psychotherapist and eleven years as a divorce and family mediator, I have learned for myself that the chief factor in choosing a parenting arrangement, after divorce, is a realistic assessment of what the capacities and limitations are in the parenting relationship between two good people. Table 8-1 delineates factors that, in my experience, may lead to a good outcome and those that may lead to a poor outcome for children of divorce.

Collaborative/Cooperative Mode

In the early 1990s, conventional wisdom's ideal postdivorce parenting arrangement seems to be the collaborative/cooperative mode, which often mirrors a joint legal custody decision, and presumes that the couple has the ability to make cooperative decisions in areas of the children's medical, educational, and religious needs.

I tell people that it takes two individuals who are truly *capable* of collaboration, not just *willing* to collaborate. I ask that each assess his or her own and the other's ability to be genuinely cooperative, including considering travel time away from the area in which the children reside, geographical and emotional distance from one another any workaholism, alcoholism, and so forth. Is each of them—in terms of temperament, and by virtue of career-stage, remarriage, level of anger or antagonism—capable of and truly desirous of a collaborative parenting arrangement?

If people believe that they *must* be capable, by virtue of contemporary trend and desire, but find themselves falling short each time they attempt to collaborate, their individual self-esteem will most likely be decreased rather than enhanced, by virtue of having selected a postdivorce parenting arrangement that they are not in actual fact capable of carrying out.

I tell people that admitting to themselves that this mode is not for them or is not working, is ceasing to fail every single time they do not achieve

collaboration. They may feel like failures in not achieving an ideal, like women who attempt natural childbirth, but need medication, or women who would like to nurse their babies and cannot in practice do so. In both cases the better part of wisdom says to accept reality, not trying to do battle for the sake of an ideal. People may always reassess their assumptions and agreements about what they thought they were capable of doing—the sections of divorce agreements having to do with the children may be modified.

Tandem Mode

I tell people that if collaborative/cooperative postdivorce parenting arrangements aren't for them, for whatever reason, they may still have joint legal custody or joint decision making by choosing, on their own, what I call a *tandem*, separate but equal arrangement of parenting. In this mode, each parent is capable of assuming one hundred percent of the responsibility for each child. Each parent puts parenting very high on his or her list of priorities. These parents, however, don't often do well or enjoy conferring frequently with one another about anything. They elect to meet infrequently and often with a third party present, to discuss important aspects of the children's rules, discipline, material and emotional needs, their scheduling, and so forth. These parents should pledge to be as civil as possible for the sake of their children, writing to one another when necessary and conferring in person

when that is required. They should pledge especially not to send their children back and forth with messages from one another. They will not want to make their inabilities to confer into a burden for their children by asking them to be go-betweens.

In some cases, one parent, often a mother but more and more frequently a father; will have an uneven amount of responsibility for the children. *Quality* of parenting by both parents is the important ingredient. Minimizing the transitions and the disruptions that accompany the transitions is an asset of this mode. Parents may, of course have joint decision making custody of the children, even though the amount of time they actually spend with the children is unequal or uneven. The parent who has less time with the children may be in frequent telephone contact with the children, keep the postal carrier busy, as well as have a close relationship with the teacher and principal at the children's school whether near or far from his or her residence. Even where there is antagonism between parents, the school where the child spends the majority of his or her waking hours during the school year, may well be a neutral place where both parents can track their children's social, academic, and emotional growth.

I tell people about the two-year-old boy whose mother had no understanding of the continuing importance of his contact with his father. Rather than moving some distance away to be near her family, she took the

mediation therapist's information about children's needs to heart and decided to stay near the father. He in turn has called the boy every night for three years to say goodnight; he also takes his son two evenings a week for dinner and one overnight a week. The boy lives primarily with his mother, but has by no means lost his dad. The two parents can barely stand the sight of one another but are trying hard not to cripple their son with their antipathy. The little boy, by all reports, is flourishing.

Single/Predominantly Single Mode

The last postdivorce parenting mode I mention is the single or predominantly single style, the advantages of which are the ease involved when one need not coordinate, check things out with, or plan with the other parent. The disadvantages are that children lack enough contact with and input from the other parent, and, in addition, the parenting parent is not getting help from, relief by, or coordination with another parent. This mode should be chosen when a parent is dangerous to a child—physically or sexually abusive, or having an acute or chronic untreated mental illness, for example. This mode will benefit those children who need to be separated from the abuse or the illness. Sole legal custody would be the most likely form of legal decision making chosen for this type of parenting arrangement. Table 8-2 illustrates the correlation between styles of parenting, actual living arrangements of children, and legal custody options.

The Need for New Parenting Skills

Regardless of which mode parents choose for parenting during marital separation and divorce, both parents will need to learn new skills. Some will need to learn to set consistent, firm limits, some will need to learn to nurture, to listen, to be on duty constantly. It won't do to say, "Oh well, they are allowed to stay up indefinitely at the other house; it must be part of their character by now ... I won't need to enforce bedtime here either," or, "They travel so much with the other parent, I better travel equally with them, as well."

When people in mediation therapy choose to separate or divorce, I frequently will share my belief that, at least as important as their marriage vows were, and probably more so, are the vows they make to their children at this time. These vows may be individual and private, or collective and shared with the children. In any event, they are serious vows and tailored to meet the kinds of commitments parents want and need to make to their children at this time. I give two sorts of vows as examples:

A mother's vow to her teenage son might be:

> I willingly take responsibility, to the best of my ability, for nurturing your growth and development. I will not wait for your father to keep you in line, to set those firm limits for you, but will do so myself. I promise that I will not do too many things for you, because it is easier for me, but will foster your doing for yourself, for your self-confidence, and competence. When I

cannot provide for your needs, I promise to get the kind of help for you or myself that I believe we need. I choose not to feel or act like a victim, a "poor me" mother left with the care of a teen-age boy, but to feel and act like a mature, autonomous, and responsible parent, who is very proud to be your mother.

The parents of three young children might vow:

If it were not vitally necessary, and if we hadn't given it years of thought, we—your parents—would not choose to live in two different homes. Since it has become necessary to do so, we pledge to continue to communicate weekly about you, and more often, if necessary. We will talk about how you are doing with the new living arrangements, in school and outside of school. We intend to be present for you, together as your parents when appropriate: at your ballgames, skating shows, graduations, weddings, the births of your children. We intend not to spoil you, but to see that your emotional, your physical, and your spiritual needs will be met to the best of our abilities.

Research Findings

How can we, as mediation therapists, use the research that has been done on the effects of divorce on children to help parting parents keep their vows to their children? For one thing, we can avoid taking research too literally. Knowing findings of research studies is like having a chart of a large lake. The shortest distance from point A to point B on the chart may appear to be to go due east yet the chart doesn't provide information on prevailing winds, or daily weather patterns. To illustrate, a psychologist called me to ask what research findings indicate about the preferred living arrangements for four-year-old girls. The psychologist's clients were calling to ask whether

their four-year-old daughter should live in two homes (Sunday to Wednesday in one house and after school Wednesday to afternoon Sunday in the other, rather than living with Mom and visiting Dad every weekend, with an overnight every other weekend). What guidance can any helping professional provide?

Susan Steinman's research project on joint custody showed that many four- and five-year-old girls, and some seven- and eight-year-old boys experienced confusion about which home they were going home to at any given time.[2] And Wallerstein's research, reported in *Second Chances*, showed some evidence that elementary school children can handle time, distance, and alternating schedules more effectively than can pre-school children.[3] Are these two pieces of evidence enough to advise the couple to have their daughter live in one home, primarily?

What about evidence that fathers stay better involved and are themselves less depressed when they have more access to their children? Is this an important consideration? This couple wondered whether they should discount their individual needs as a two-career divorcing couple: each needed time without their daughter to attend to the myriad of administrative details of running a home alone, to say nothing of time needed to establish themselves socially as independent entities. These parents were delighted to know about some research relative to their daughter's needs, and they

realized they needed to be aware of their specific child's personality and special needs, as well as their own needs. They decided to have their daughter live with each of them part of the week, graduating to a whole week at a time later on, and then two weeks at a later time as she grows older. Their daughter's input along the way would be solicited and given the greatest of consideration. They decided that for the time being, she would wear red sneakers while at Mom's house and blue while at Dad's home. They intend to be in close communication with her preschool teachers and principal, who are aware that they desire her well-being, above their own convenience or needs. They explicitly asked school personnel how their parenting arrangements appear to be affecting their daughter. They were willing to change arrangements as many times as necessary and so indicated. They heard information about transitions being difficult for children, and spoke of the once per week transition at midweek being less of a disruption than two at the beginning and end of every weekend, with a probable third and fourth if Dad took his daughter for dinner twice a week, which he would want to do, rather than waiting until the weekend to see her. Research, I tell people, should be used as a guideline to inform one's own notions of what would be the best solution for a particular child.

As a mediation therapist, I have highlighted or selectively noted aspects of research on joint custody and on the effects of divorce on children and parents. I share this information with my clients both in chart form (see

charts at the end of this chapter) and verbally.

Stresses and Benefits of Children Living in Two Homes

Steinman's Study. Susan Steinman's small research project on joint custody reported in 1981 delineates stresses and benefits of living in two homes at least 33 percent of the time with each parent; some aspects of her research that I find helpful are presented in the following lists.[4]

Steinman lists the following as stresses:

Where parents were in conflict over child-rearing values, there were troubled kids. [I believe this may be so, regardless of the number of homes in which the children reside.]

Where one parent was financially or emotionally less well-off than the other, there were worried kids.

One-third of all kids in the study had loyalty conflicts. One girl commented that it could never be equal between her parents because there were seven days in the week. Another had to remember to give Dad a kiss if she had kissed Mom.

One-fourth of all kids (including one-half of all four- to five-years old girls and many seven- to eight-year-old boys) experienced confusion about which home they were to be in, when.

Distance between homes was a problem for some children, but not for

others.

Many adolescents demonstrate needing increased control over their lives and the loosening of psychological ties to their parents.

Even though they knew it wasn't feasible, most of the kids wished their parents were back together again.

One-third of the children felt *overburdened by maintaining a strong presence in two homes* [emphasis added].

In all families in the study, maintaining two households required considerable effort on the parts of parents and children, alike.

On the other hand, Steinman's study found several benefits of two homes:

Having two involved parents to whom they were strongly attached. They did not suffer feelings of rejection or abandonment often seen in children whose non-custodial parent does not maintain frequent and regular contact.

Their sense of importance in their family—that their parent had gone to a great deal of effort to maintain the joint custody—and this enhanced their sense of self-esteem. They felt wanted by both parents.

Most of the children were not torn by loyalty conflicts, but rather felt free to love and be with both parents.[5]

Wallerstein's Studies. I find many of Judith Wallerstein's findings about children living in two homes—with joint physical custody—salient for the mediation therapy population. Dr. Wallerstein reports that the overall quality of life and the relationships between members of a family are what determine the well-being of children of divorce. The joint custody research indicates that the frequency of transitions between households could be upsetting to children. Wallerstein's findings show that two years after divorce, children raised in joint custody households—that is, children who live in two households with either parent—are no better adjusted than children raised in sole custody households. By itself, after two years, joint custody does not minimize the negative impact of divorce on children. Over a longer period of time, Wallerstein suggests joint custody may have positive psychological effects[6].

The mediation therapist is likely to benefit by knowing about Wallerstein's proposal of additional psychological tasks that children of divorce need to accomplish in addition to the normal developmental tasks[7]. Seven tasks are listed and described below:

· understanding the divorce

· strategic withdrawal

· dealing with loss

· dealing with anger

· working out guilt

· accepting the permanence of the divorce

· taking a chance on love

Understanding the divorce is described by Wallerstein as achieving a realistic understanding of what divorce means in the child's family, along with the concrete consequences of divorce for a particular child. I tell mediation therapy clients that their children need to acknowledge the reality of the household changes, and, as Wallerstein says, they need to differentiate their fantasy fears from reality.

Strategic withdrawal means that as they divorce and live separately, parents need to understand that their children will benefit by disengaging from parental conflict and stress, resuming their customary social and academic pursuits. Wallerstein emphasizes that children need their parents' support to remain children.

The task of absorbing loss is described by Wallerstein as the most difficult task imposed on children by divorce. Children are required to "overcome the profound sense of rejection, humiliation, vulnerability and powerlessness they feel with the departure of one parent. When the parent

leaves, children of all ages blame themselves."[8] I tell mediation therapy clients that their children will need parental support and may need the support of professional psychotherapists, to grapple with and resolve multiple feelings of loss:

· the loss of the family unit and of self-identity as a member of the unit

· the loss of the presence of both parents together

· the possible loss of neighborhoods, schools, proximity of friends and relatives

Dealing with anger is a task that Wallerstein describes as difficult for children who feel both love and anger for parents whom they perceive as making attempts to improve their lives. I encourage parents to tell their children that they are able to accept their children's feelings about the divorce, including their intense feelings of anger and frustration.

Wallerstein indicates that the task of working out guilt for children implies going on with their own lives, untying themselves from the bond of guilt to a troubled parent. The task of accepting a divorce is done bit by bit by children, whose acceptance of the permanence of a divorce can not be achieved all at once.

Finally, the task of taking a chance on love requires the realistic assessment that while divorce is always a possibility in their own lives, young adults whose parents have divorced are capable of loving and being loved, of committing and of achieving fidelity[9].

Parents Talking with Children about Divorce

Predictably, in mediation therapy, soon after parents have made a decision to separate or divorce they wonder aloud about how to go about telling the children:

- when to tell them: right away, after their exams, when the school year ends, before or after they hear from colleges?
- whether to tell them as a unit, or the older ones together, the younger ones together or whether to tell them individually, one-to-one? Should parents talk to children together or separately, or both?
- what to tell the children? Should all ages of children get the same explanation?

Rather than giving definitive answers to these important questions, the mediation therapist sensitively explores the probable impact of various explanations of divorce, of timing, and of talking with various groupings of children. The mediation therapist eventually will come to have numerous

alternative suggestions to add to the parents' own rational beliefs and intuitions about what, how, and when their children can hear about their decision to separate or to divorce.

Including Children in Mediation Therapy

The vast majority of parents in mediation therapy who choose to divorce are committed to attempting to minimize negative effects of divorce on their children. They are eager to learn information that will help them assist their children in remaining on track developmentally as much as possible. After a decision is made to separate or divorce, many parents ask for additional sessions to discuss their decision and its ramifications. Family groups with several teenage children virtually always request sessions with their children to discuss the decision. When a group of young adults clearly outnumbers the two parents, the parents seem to know instinctively that discussion with the mediation therapist as well as the children will facilitate the expression and resolution of feelings.

Teenagers and young adults want to ask various types of questions:

· What happened to the marriage?

· Are our parents okay? How is their mental health?

· Will there be enough money to go around?

· Will all of us still be able to go to college?

· Who will take on the departing parent's household responsibilities?

· How much time will we spend with each of our parents?

Parents sometimes opt to meet individually with some or each of their children. Particularly poignant are meetings between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, where children ask parents tough questions, and parents give thoughtful, sensitive answers in spite of being in a great amount of pain. Individual meetings between one or two parents and a child, and group meetings of all children with the mediation therapist (or with their parents and the mediation therapist) are each effective in their own ways. Individual meetings provide children with the opportunity to ask pointed questions and provide parents with the opportunity to give information, reassurance and attention to a child individually. Group meetings seem to help young people collectively to express dissatisfactions with parents and with the situation. An eight-year-old girl and her father sobbed together about his leaving, while the mother and four-year-old daughter quietly shared in their grief. The relief and clear smiles on the faces of father, mother, and daughters after the session were indicators of the beginning of a transition from being stuck in inertia to the implementation of a marital separation accomplished through a meeting of a whole family.

An example of an individual meeting between parent and child is a college-age daughter who had the chance to express her sadness and intense anger with her father who acknowledged that he was leaving the marriage for another woman. The daughter ended the session by saying: “I love you very much, even though I am so angry with you!”

Mediation therapists can be extraordinary resources for parents. They may convey information about children’s developmental needs at the time of divorce by sharing experience, observations, and research findings about children, adolescents, and young adults of divorce. Helping parents understand that their decision to divorce has a potentially negative impact—as well as opportunities for growth—is intended to help parents minimize negative impact on the children and aid their children to grow through the experience. Through education and brainstorming, and by providing a forum in which parents and children together may face and discuss their mutual crisis, mediation therapists are part of a process of helping families plan for the future.

Summary

Each child is unique. Finding meaningful ways to talk with each child about the divorce, and to stay available to each of them for days after they are told about the decision, is important. Accurately recognizing each child’s

developmental stage and what that implies for her or his needs for reassurance and understanding is also important. In addition, each child's sadness, rage, anger, or disappointment is critical. Perhaps even more important is that parents recognize their own feelings of desperation, fear of loneliness or of being abandoned and that they don't assume that their children feel this same way. Too frequently, through projective identification, parents falsely perceive in their children the sorrow or feelings of abandonment they are feeling themselves. In order to truly empathize with a child's feelings, a parent must be able to feel with the actual feelings of the child. A parent must try to hurt with him or her, without becoming the child, without taking over his or her feelings or assuming that the parents' own feelings belong to the child. A parent can be with the child, wherever he or she is, but the parent cannot make the feelings disappear, nor should he or she assume they are worse than they are. Accepting the child's own unique, separate feelings is the task at hand for divorcing parents. Being separate from the child is the only road to closeness.

Having made a carefully thought-out decision for separation or divorce in mediation therapy gives people a solid basis of inner conviction that they are taking the right course of action. This inner conviction has guided people in conveying to their children that they have made an important, well thought-out decision, which may unfortunately have negative impact on the whole family. Their convictions may help them convey as well that they care

deeply about all of the children and intend to minimize the negative impact on all of them wherever possible.

Seeing themselves as people who want very much to make principled, well-considered decisions is part of the mediation therapy process. Although the road ahead, for children and parents alike, may be rocky in places, parents have every reason to believe that they will continue to act in the best interests of their children—trusting themselves to consider each individual's needs, just as they trusted themselves to make the best decision about the future direction of their relationship.

Notes

[1] Wallerstein and Kelly, 17

[2] .Steinman, 410.

[3] Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 268.

[4] Steinman, 403-414.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Wallerstein and Blakeslee, 270-272

[7] Ibid, 288-294.

[8] Ibid, 290.

[9] Ibid, 288-294.

Appendix:
Factors Influencing Adjustment of Children of Divorce

Table 8-1 Factors Determining Good versus Poor Outcome for Children of Divorce

These factors are derived from Miller Wiseman's eighteen years of working with and observing families in crisis and those separating and divorcing.

Factors for Parents to Consider Which May Facilitate a Good Outcome for Children of Divorce	Factors for Parents to Consider Which May Contribute to a Poor Outcome for Children of Divorce.
1. Making a thoughtful, well-considered decision to separate or divorce.	1. The probable negative impact on children of parent suddenly being gone from the household.
2. Considering many alternative solutions to marriage crisis.	2. The negative effect on children of being given no (or an inadequate) explanation of the household rupture and no reassurance.
3. Sensitively informing children of the decision to divorce or separate, being aware of each child's developmental needs.	3. The negative effect on children of being given too many household responsibilities or too much responsibility for siblings or for parents' emotional stability.
4. Respecting each child's age-appropriate need to maintain an	4. The negative impact on children of parents' taking over too

internal mental and emotional image of each parent. Planning the frequency of parental contact around the child's need.

5. Including the children, when appropriate, in the move from the household.

6. The desirability of parents learning new ways to set limits and nurture in order to round out parenting skills.

7. The desirability of parents reinforcing each other's limit-setting with the children and not undermining one another.

8. The importance of parents being predictably, consistently there for their children.

9. The importance of parents providing appropriate, safe caregivers for children in their absence.

10. The importance of a realistic assessment of each child's developmental level; explanations about the divorce, expectations of each child are geared to an age-appropriate level.

many tasks for children or of over indulging children, due to their guilt about what children are undergoing.

5. The negative impact of a parent choosing a child as a confidante or partner substitute.

6. The negative impact of a parent's being preoccupied with a new love, work, depression, anxiety, or unemployment.

7. The negative impact of a parent or a sibling being verbally, physically, or sexually abusive or neglectful, consciously or unconsciously.

8. The negative impact of parents' undermining each others' limit- setting, authority, or esteem.

9. The negative impact of excluding children from romantic or even platonic relationships of parents

10. The negative impact of an actual physical loss of one parent, or the emotional loss resulting from the neglect or illness of a parent.

Table 8-2 Styles of Postdivorce Parenting

Style	Requirements	Possible Living Arrangements	Legal Custody Typically
Collaborative/ Cooperative Mode *Parents talk together*	Having the *ability* not just willingness to collaborate with other parent	Two homes Primary home with one parent; visitation by the noncustodial parent in or out of the house Single home; other parent lives close by or at some distance	Joint
Tandem Mode *Parents talk through a third party*	Capacity to assume responsibility for each child Ability to accept that frequent cooperation/collaboration with the other parent is not possible Meeting with or writing to other parents as often as necessary to communicate about children's needs Agreeing not to communicate by asking children to be go-betweens	Two homes Primary home with one parent; other parent visits, but not in the home.	Joint
Single/	Having the ability to parent	Children live in one	Sole

Predominantly Single Mode *One parent is predominant*	with little or no input from the other parent	home predominantly Other parent away; other parent not involved Other parent occasionally involved

Table 8-3
Talking with Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults About Divorce: Developmental Stage Considerations

The complexity of the explanation of a divorce, depends upon many considerations, including children's ages and developmental stages. The following proposal in chart form consists of stage-typical principles for talking to children about divorce at various stages of their psychological development.

Principles for Talking with Pre-School Children about Divorce	**Example of Principle**
Parents help child:	Parent says to child:
• By helping child reduce self blame.	"It's not your fault that Mommy and Daddy aren't together, and you're not bad."
• By helping child develop and maintain a secure internal mental-emotional image of both parents.	"I know when you're with me you still love Mommy. Sometimes, you miss your mom a lot and you get a tummyache or headache. When that happens, let me know, and we'll call Mom."
• By helping child to understand the concrete consequences of divorce for his or her own life.	"Daddy is coming tonight and every Tuesday and Thursday to take you to dinner. And you will sleep over night at Dad's every weekend—all the green days we've marked on the calendar."
• By providing continuing physical care,	"Daddy and I will make sure you have enough food, clothes, toys and love at both houses."

love and support to each
of their children.

Principles for Talking with Elementary School Children	Example of Principle
Parents help child:	Parent says to child:
• By helping child reduce self-blame.	"You are not at all to blame for the divorce. It's not your fault even though you might feel or think it's your fault. There's nothing you could have done differently."
• By reassuring child that attempts to divide parents, manipulate them, cause them to be competitive or antagonistic will not work.	"Telling me Dad lets you do it at his house won't work to get what you want at this house. "
• By reassuring child and demonstrating that she will not fall between the cracks, that parents will meet regularly to talk about their accomplishments and needs.	"Mom and I talk regularly about how you're doing and about what we both feel you need."
• By being open to child's reactions to divorce and by understanding that emotional reactions will be life-long and will reoccur with each developmental stage.	"I know it must be very hard and confusing to live in two different places with two sets of friends, two bedrooms, two neighborhoods."
• By being consistent, not changing visitation plans, living arrangements suddenly. Schedules, colored charts will be made to make life more predictable for child.	"You can count on me to pick you up every blue day on your calendar."
• By being prepared to give child one-to-one attention for several years after separation to attempt to ameliorate the losses.	"Every Tuesday evening you can count on just the two of us doing something special together."
• Minimize feeling pulled apart, caught in the middle, stretched to the breaking point.	"Sometimes kids feel they can't make everybody happy. When you feel this stress, let me know."
• By attempting not to overindulge child with toys, food, vacations,	"I know that sometimes buying toys makes you feel better. I love you very

sleeping with the child.	much even though I'm not buying toys today."
• By encouraging and helping the child talk about his or her feelings to appropriate others.	"There are a lot of kids and even grownups who can understand your feelings."
• By not encouraging child to be parent-like, taking on too much responsibility or by being a confidante to parents.	"I appreciate your concern about my breaking up with Jim. How are you feeling about not having him around much any more?"
• By understanding child's regression in development initially after separation.	"I know it really hurts right now. Let's spend the whole morning doing just what you'd like to do."
• By hearing child's wishes that parents reunite, explaining the reality, while sympathizing with the wish for reconciliation.	"It's natural to want your parents back together again. I sympathize with wanting that, but it isn't going to happen."
• By constantly demonstrating to the child that parents are consistent, reliable, predictable, still protective.	"I just want you to know that wherever I'm living, I will try to be there for you in big and little emergencies as best I can."
• By recognizing that if both parents suddenly need to work, the child will experience another loss—of a parent who is consistently at home.	"It's a BIG change to have your parents divorce and your Mom working at the same time. I know it's hard. What would make it better?"

Principles for Talking With Junior High School Children	**Examples of Principle**
Parents help child:	Parent says to child:
• By reducing self-blame.	"You didn't do anything to cause the divorce. The problems were between Mom and me."
• By reducing child's need to take on the role of the absent parent.	"I appreciate your doing the grocery shopping, but I want to be sure it isn't interfering with your homework and soccer."
• By encouraging child to share thoughts and feelings about the divorce with	"When you're ready, it can be helpful to talk with other kids

appropriate others.	your age whose parents are divorced, or with adults who understand."
• By being open to hearing reactions to the divorce. Questions will be answered by parents at depth when they are asked.	"We both still care about you very much. Mom and Dad's feelings for each other have changed, but not our feelings about you."
• By staying parental and protective, minimizing competition with child when both parent and child are dating.	"We both are dating, but I am still your mother."
• By minimizing adult emotional and physical dependency upon the child.	"No, don't stay home this evening because I am sad. I am okay and I want you to have a good time."
• By providing as stable a context as possible so that age-appropriate separation-individuation may proceed.	"I'll be right here in case you need to call me for a ride."
• By recognizing that parent's acting out his or her own painful feelings is providing an example for child to act out feelings with substances, sexually, or through anti-social behavior.	"I did foul up last night and I feel bad about it. I want to be in control, and a good role-model for you."
• By recognizing the emotional vulnerability of the child who is in transition, realizing that divorce will add a risk factor to an already burdened child.	"I know it's tough to be handling junior high and the divorce all at once. There are special people to talk with who help with all of these changes."
• By recognizing the number of transitions involved in the divorce and moving to junior high school; helping the child to minimize other changes of home, neighborhood, peer groups where possible.	"Maybe we should put off the change in the weekend schedule until you feel more settled in our new house."
• By recognizing the impact of both parents suddenly needing to work and by providing consistent after school structure for the child.	"Mrs. Smythe is going to be at the house every day after school, making dinner. She'll be available to you if you need her."

Principles for Talking with Young Adults about Divorce	**Examples of Principle**

Parent helps child:	Parent says to child:
• By expressing confidence in child's various skills.	"You've learned some things by having your Mom and me in different places: like respect for different values, how to negotiate and compromise."
• By expressing the belief that child is separate from them and need not follow the same divorce course.	"My hope for you is that, at the right time, you will find someone very special to marry and with whom to have a family."
• By expressing faith in child's ability to persevere in work and academically in spite of the crisis of divorce.	"I know it is very hard to hang in there with your studies and activities, but I believe you can do it."
• By being aware that child may believe that marriage is a sham, that many years of marriage and raising children was meaningless, that the young adult's ability to trust himself or herself in relationships may be impaired.	"I still believe in marriage. Just because Dad's and my marriage didn't last forever doesn't mean that you won't be able to have a lasting relationship."
• By being able to accept no for an answer when: - asking young adult for information about the other parent - asking the child to function with the parent in a surrogate spouse's position, - asking young adult to meet parent's needs which would curtail the young person's own developmental progress.	"I respect your right to say no. You shouldn't have to be put in the middle between your mother and me."

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