

- **Expect to experience a range of feelings.**

Individuals whose parents are divorcing or divorced often experience problems with concentration, feelings of sadness, anger and depression. They may also be preoccupied with anxieties about the future and with feelings of responsibility for one or more family members. Reactions like these are normal and healing takes time. Sharing these feelings with others who have had similar experiences may be helpful.

- **Become informed about what is going to happen.**

Divorces frequently are accompanied by an absence of accurate open communication with "children." It is important that you break this conspiracy of silence and talk directly with each of your parents. Discuss such matters as when the divorce will occur, who will be living where and what changes, if any, will happen with your financial arrangements. Focus on what you need to know for your plans, not on information which is more properly in the private domain of each parent.

- **Keep clear of unhealthy alliances.**

Divorcing parents often slip into trying to get you to side with one against the other. This may be done blatantly, by openly criticizing and blaming the other parent, or subtly, by being more needy and vulnerable than the other parent and asking for excessive help or comfort. With few exceptions, these efforts by parents are designed either to get revenge against the "wrong doer" or to avoid the pain and anxiety of their own problems. To protect your own emotional well-being you will need clearly and firmly to refuse to be put in the middle.

- **Help your parents understand what you are trying to do for yourself.**

During a divorce and its aftermath, your parents may have difficulty seeing things clearly or being helpful to you. Your efforts at this time to help them understand what your experiences are and how you are trying to take care of yourself may prevent hurt feelings or misinterpretations of your actions.

- **Find out what works for you.**

Reactions vary widely to the situation of parental divorce. There are no foolproof methods for getting through it. Pay attention to whatever you find helpful, to whatever allows you to stay involved in your own life productively without ignoring the feelings and issues raised by the divorce. Above all, try to avoid making major decisions and changes in your life plans. Your familiar surroundings, friends, activities and plans will usually help you keep on the right path.

- **Learn to use helping resources outside your family.**

Families almost instinctively exclude or try to protect themselves from "outsiders" during a crisis. Your parents' divorce makes it especially important for you to be resourceful about other places and people who can help. Friends will listen and written materials can help you better understand what's going on. In addition, established groups such as your church, self-help groups and professional counselors can provide additional support in helping you through this time.

You are welcome to stop by or call to make an appointment:

**131 Van Housen Hall  
315-276-2330  
8:30-4:30 pm**



THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
**Potsdam**

## **YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE**

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Are your parents divorced or getting a divorce? Although adult children of divorced parents may not think about it all the time, their lives have been subtly influenced by their parents' divorce. A divorce always affects children, even adult children, and almost always has some lingering effects.

For example, consider the following questions:

- Do you feel guilt or responsibility for your parents' divorce?
- Have you ever felt that you lost part of your childhood because of the divorce?
- Do you feel either of your parents depends too much on you for emotional support?
- Do you find yourself in the role of "peacemaker" when your parents argue?
- Do you feel that either parent is so involved with his or her own problems or new relationships that your feelings or needs are often overlooked?

These are but a few of the ways you may have been affected by your parents' divorce, and your answers to each of these questions can represent many issues. Your academic work, your present and future relationships and even your emotional well-being may all be influenced by how you resolve problems and feelings associated with your parents' divorce.

## How to Cope With Your Parents' Divorce

Let's start with some basics. First, you did not cause your parents' marital problems or divorce. Second, it is typical and normal to have strong emotional responses to the divorce, often accompanied by feelings of split loyalties to your parents and pressures to rescue the more fragile parent. Third, you have a right to continue your own life and to attend to your own hopes and needs during this period. Consider the following ideas about what you have a right to want or expect, even if your parents are not currently able to provide them or able to understand their importance.

- You have the right to want a satisfying relationship with each parent.
- You have the right not to be caught between your parents as they struggle with each other.
- You have the right to your feelings, whether they are anger, frustration, pain, love, etc.
- You have the right to work through your feelings and to receive cooperation from other family members in dealing with problems you are experiencing related to your parents' divorce.
- You have the right to maintain your position in priority for family resources, especially concerning support for school.

## Basic Guidelines for Survival and Growth

The following tips on how to take care of yourself may serve as guidelines for personal self-care. Not all are applicable to every situation. Use them as they seem to fit for you.

The first three guidelines are based on materials that appear in *Mom's House, Dad's House* by Isolina Ricci (reproduced by permission of the publisher).

- **Don't go through this period alone.**

Despite frequently touted ideals of rugged independence and making it alone, there is no particular virtue or benefit in going through a crisis completely alone. More realistically, isolation can raise already excessive stress levels, delaying your progress and possibly leading to later complications. Support and acceptance by other people are absolutely essential during big changes.

- **Care for yourself emotionally and physically.**

Adjustment to your parents' divorce takes enormous amounts of energy. If you don't take care of yourself, stress may get the upper hand. Listen to yourself; your emotions are not tyrants, but are parts of you that have a right to be heard and cared for. Make time for your inner self, for contemplation and for quiet time alone. Find safe ways to blow off steam, ways to let some of your tensions escape. Take time out for exercise, rest, and recreation.

- **Don't become an emotional junkie.**

People can get hooked on strong emotions such as anger, depression, grief, blame, guilt, hostility or revenge. An emotional junkie doesn't work out feelings in safe or structured ways, but instead wants to keep the feelings. Emotional junkies wear their feelings like a badge of courage. To avoid becoming an emotional junkie, it is important to take stock of your emotions to see if they are truly expressions of how you feel or if they are habits, ways of getting attention or ways to avoid other feelings.