



For Kids: How Does Divorce Affect You?

Emily and Sam are going through a lot of changes. Their parents are getting a divorce. Now instead of spending all their time at one home, they are living with one parent during the week and spending every weekend at the other parent's home. Along with all this switching around, Emily and Sam have new rules and new chores.

They also have many changing feelings. If you have experienced a divorce, you may understand some of their feelings. Divorce can be confusing. Emily and Sam learned a lot when they talked about their feelings.



Emily: *When I come back from Mom's, Dad always asks me what we did. When I come back from Dad's Mom asks about Dad. I feel funny telling Mom about Dad and Dad about Mom. I feel like a spy.*

Sometimes parents are curious about your life while you're away, but you don't have to tell one parent about the other. What happens between you and your parent is just between you two.

Sam: *Sometimes it feels confusing going back and forth between Mom's house and Dad's house. I have two families. Most people only have one. I feel like I should just pick one, but I don't want to choose between my mom and my dad.*

You don't have to choose. Even when apart your Mom and Dad will always be your parents. Many people have two or more families and one isn't better than the other.

Emily: *I hope my parents will get back together. I often think about what I can do to make us all a family again. I think that if I'm extra good, Mom and Dad will stop arguing. So far, nothing has worked. That makes me feel disappointed.*

Your parent's relationship is their concern. There's nothing you can do to get them back together. Many children want their parents to get back together. Your feelings are natural, but what you wish won't change your parents.

Sam: *I have a lot more responsibility now. I have to make sure Emily is okay and help out at home. I don't mind but sometimes I feel tense. I want to hang out with my friends after school.*

Many times a divorce will bring new rules and responsibilities. It's great to help out, but remember, you're still a kid. You don't have to take on too much. That's the parent's job. Talk to your Mom or Dad about this.

Emily: Sometimes I worry because my Mom and Dad can't afford things like they used to. I'm afraid they'll run out of money.

It does cost more to run two homes. Your parents may not be able to buy you as much as they used to. But remember, the money is their concern, not yours.

Sam: I feel angry and mad about the divorce. I wonder whose fault it was. Sometimes I think it was Dad's fault and I get angry at him. Sometimes I think it's my fault. Maybe if I hadn't been so much trouble, Mom wouldn't have moved out. I feel sad and guilty when I think about it.

A divorce is never a child's fault. It happens because there was a problem in the marriage, not with the children. It's not just one parent's fault either. Couples who divorce usually have many problems that have built up over time.

Emily: I feel mad and sad about the divorce, but I can't say that to either of my parents because I might hurt their feelings.

This is a common feeling that children have. Ask your parents if you can talk to someone outside of your family, such as a school guidance counselor, pastor, or a therapist to help you with these feelings.

Do some of these feelings sound familiar to you? It's helpful to talk about feelings like Emily and Sam have. It may help to talk to other children. Or you could talk to an adult like a teacher, coach or your parents.

When coping with their parents' divorce, children may experience many feelings: anger, confusion, guilt, anxiety, worry, pressure, fear, hope, happiness and sadness. All these feelings are natural. And all kinds of feelings are okay.

For more information

It's not your fault, KoKo Bear. Vicky Lansky (1998). Book Peddlers. This book is designed for parents and children ages 3 to 5 years to read together.

Dinosaurs Divorce: A guide for changing families. Laurene Krasney Brown and Marc Brown (1986). Little Brown and Company. This award-winning book is designed for parents and young school-aged children to read together.

How do I feel about: My parents' Divorce. Julia Cole (1997). Copper Beach Books. For older school-aged children.

Pre-Teen Pressures: Divorce. Debra Goldentyer (1998). Steck-Vaughn Company.

References

Shared Custody: Increasing Benefits and Reducing Strains. Oregon State University Extension Service. Leon, Kim & Cole, Kelly.

Helping Children Understand Divorce. University of Missouri Extension <<http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/hesguide/humanrel/gh6600.htm>>

*Fact sheet developed by Mary W. Temke, UNH Cooperative Extension Human Development Specialist
with help from University of New Hampshire graduate student, Rebecca Carman
Updated 5/06 by Emily M. Douglas, UNH Extension Family Education and Policy Specialist*

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