

Divorce Never Ends For Children

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Based on my personal experience, and what I've observed knowing dozens of people with divorced parents, it is my belief that there is no divorce that does not severely damage a child and set them back for their entire life.

Some divorces are necessary, as in cases of abuse or addiction problems. Some children of divorced parents will appear to survive or thrive. But children of divorce are much less likely to reach their full potential because they spend so many years and so much energy trying to climb out of the hole they start in. I will enumerate some of the problems it creates.

1) Divorce places the parent's wants over the child's needs. When parents divorce, and one parent is no longer in the home, this sends an loud clear message to the child, "The person who has more reason than anyone on earth to recognize your value, does not value you. You must be worthless." The absent parent can try to counter this by telling the child frequently and emphatically that he or she does love and value the child. However, actions speak louder than words. No statement can ever compensate for the parent not sleeping under the same roof. The child is going to spend a big chunk of his or her life trying to find some other way to feel valued. This can manifest in obsession with work or money, drug addictions, promiscuity, etc. Obviously, children from intact families also sometimes have these problems. Divorce pretty much guarantees them.

2) Divorce is a choice. Some children lose a parent to illness, war, or accidental death, and this is very traumatic. The difference with divorce is that a child's parent makes a deliberate decision to destroy the most important thing they provide to the child - a family. There is no disease or enemy or bad luck to blame. You are choosing to scar your own child.

3) Divorce ends one parent-child relationship and replaces it with a host-guest relationship. Every child needs a balance of love and discipline from both parents. When one parent becomes non-custodial, it reduces their discipline role to near zero. Contact with the non-custodial parent becomes a "visit," usually involving an activity, a meal, and perhaps sleeping over. In this "quality" time, the non-custodial parent is far less likely to discipline the child. The parent wants to avoid conflict (who wouldn't), and the visits allow it. Visits happen when both parents and children are on their free time. Most situations requiring discipline don't arise. The non-custodial parent never has to tell the kid to turn off the TV and do homework, because the child's not there on school nights. The non-custodial parent never has to get the teenager up in the morning, or make him clean his room. Is the non-custodial parent going to say to the child, "next time you come over, you're going to scrub my bathroom"? All of the discipline ends up coming from the parent with custody. This sets up the possibility of that parent either becoming the whip wielding slave driver, or the child just not being disciplined by anyone (which is its own kind of disaster).

4) Half of life's lessons lost. A huge portion of living life as an adult involves skills we learn from watching our

parents. We do not have time to take community college courses on household finances, maintaining a house, maintaining a car, cooking, cleaning, managing our medical care, etc. etc. In an intact family, one or the other parent will probably be competent in most of these things. In a divorced family, you're cutting your odds in half, and you're much more likely to end up with big holes in basic knowledge.

In my personal experience, my parents had a traditional split of duties. After the divorce, I lived with my mother, so I learned a lot about cooking, cleaning and caring for clothing. My father was a skilled amateur carpenter who continuously did home improvement projects. He was knowledgeable about cars. I never gained anything from that because when he came to visit, I wasn't watching him work on the house. When I visited him, he didn't take me car shopping. He took care of those chores some other time. This imbalance haunts me because now that I'm married, I have to constantly bite my tongue and not offer my opinions about cooking, cleaning, and other things my wife wants to be the expert in. On the other hand, I continually face my incompetence in maintaining the house, cars, etc. I'm always scrambling to look stuff up on the internet or find a guidebook. If I had been able to observe both parents, I could direct this time and energy to something else useful for our family.

5) Divorce prevents young adults from relating to their parents. One of the problems divorce creates is that whole decades of the parents' life become tainted as "the mistake." When the child enters the phases of their own life that parallel's their parent's marriage, the parents and child either can't have a conversation or they can't identify with one another. Consider a child of divorce is out of school and in serious relationship. He or she wants to talk about making the big decision and proposing/accepting, but that topic's off limits for discussion with the parents. The only advice they can give is negative - don't make a mistake like I did. Adjusting to being married, with its ups and downs - your parents won't recall that time of their own life. If they do, its filled with negativity toward your mother or father. It comes up again with the grandchildren, and on and on.

6) Children of divorce juggle hostile families for the rest of their life. After a divorce, all major life events that involve gathering family and friends become awkward if not hostile, and logistically difficult. The school gave us four adjacent tickets for graduation. Who is going to get snubbed? The wedding - who sits in the family pew and front table? A new baby arrives - who gets to stay in the guest room and who has to get a hotel? These may seem minor, but they combine to form a cloud over what should be joyous occasions throughout the child's whole life. Nothing is ever normal or simple. There is always tension.

7) Divorce makes maintaining adult relationships harder. There is a good chance the child of a divorce will marry someone from a different region. There is also a good chance the couple will end up in a third region that neither of them are from. Most people get about three weeks of vacation a year. A third-region couple has to split this between visits to two areas. If one set of parents is divorced, half the vacation time has to be split again. Now were talking about a parent seeing their child and grandchildren for maybe 3-4 days a year. Add in travel time (and expense) if the divorce parents aren't near each other. If family gatherings are focused on specific days - Christmas, Thanksgiving - it becomes impossible to coordinate visits. Someone is always cut short. One or both parents always feels slighted, whether they admit it or not. And what kind of relationship can be maintained based on such brief and rare visits?

8) Divorce is a huge financial setback. All the economies of scale that a marriage provides are lost. Now there are two mortgages or rents, two of every utility bill and insurance premium. Tuition and activities have to be cut back. Step-parents start to exert influence on investments and assistance for the children. If a couple is together, they might help their child pay off a student loan or contribute to a down payment. After a divorce, the new spouse is likely to veto these things, even if they are financially possible. The divorce sets back the parents on their retirement savings, which means the child may have to financially assist one or both in their retirement. In an intact family, when the father dies, his assets support the mother until her passing. In re-married families, dad's assets support the stepmother and bequests have to be split with step-siblings. Families rise out of poverty by accumulating wealth and investing in the next generation. Divorce stops or reverses this progress.

9) Divorce doubles the burden of caring for elders. The splitting of time on vacations is paralleled in the care for aging parents. In the past, larger families could share the burden of caring for the elderly. Today, a couple has to plan to assist two sets of parents with little or no help. After a divorce, all the arrangements, check-ups, phone calls, visits, etc. are doubled. You go to Dad's house to install a rail in the bathroom, and then you'll have to do it again at mom's house. You do the financial paperwork for Dad's assisted living, and then you do it again for mom. You buy shirts for Dad when he stops doing it himself (which mom would have done), and you make arrangements for lawn mowing at mom's (which dad would have done).

Again, this can all be dismissed as just part of life. We don't choose aging or death. Divorce is the parents' choice. Instead of sending their child off on their first bicycle ride with a running push, the divorced parents let the air out of their tires. Can the child roll anyway? Sort of Can they fix it? Maybe. But divorcing parents should be fully aware of what they're doing. If you're considering divorce, you obviously think you're going to get something out of it A second chance. A more romantic marriage with your cheating partner. Understand that your children will probably gain nothing and they are going to pay dearly. Is your pleasure worth the cost of their diminished lives?