

Divorce early in a child's life affects lifelong parental relationships

Written by Australian Business

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For families going through a divorce in Johnson County, Kansas, the process is stressful, confusing and challenging for everyone involved. However, new research indicates that divorce can be especially impactful for children under the age of five. These children are more likely to feel insecure in their relationships with their parents even once they have grown up.

Changes in child-parent relationships

Divorce obviously changes a child's life, but many parents don't realize how it affects a child's relationships. Research that will be published this year in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* found that children who were very young when their parents were divorced were more likely to consider their parental relationships as insecure later in life.

The studies surveyed more than 7,000 people. About a third of those participants had divorced parents and were more likely to view their current parental relationships as insecure. Participants who were five or younger at the time of the divorce felt even less secure. Researchers also noted that there wasn't a strong correlation between early parental divorce and insecurity in other relationships, such as romantic ones; only parental relationships were consistently affected.

The insecurity that participants felt in their relationships also depended on which parent they lived with. Participants who lived with their mothers felt more insecure in their paternal relationships, while those who lived with their fathers felt less confidence in their maternal relationships. This shows that legal custody and visitation arrangements should not just consider what is convenient for the parents, since these arrangements have lasting effects on child-parent relationships.

Helping children cope with divorce

While there is no way to remove all of the pain from a divorce, parents can make the situation more tolerable by presenting it properly. It is easy for parents to initially get caught up in their own emotions or concerns and overlook the needs of their children. Focusing on being open

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and supportive with children is critical during this time, however.

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry points out that children do not understand what is happening during a divorce; they often feel threatened, worry about the future and even believe that they contributed to the separation. To alleviate these feelings, parents can:-Be honest and up front, and tell children what is happening sooner than later-Present a united front, and avoid criticizing or undermining each other-Remind children that they did not cause the divorce and they are still loved by both parents-Be reassuring but acknowledge that the situation will be difficult for everyone

These actions help children understand what is happening and feel more secure. Children who are prepared and feel confident in their relationships with their parents will have a better chance of maintaining strong parental relationships during the divorce and after.

Anyone who has children and is preparing for a divorce should talk to a lawyer about finding the arrangement that will be best for the children.

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