

Bringing out the positive

There will be ups and downs in the process but teens can cope successfully with their parents' divorce and the changes it brings. You may even discover some unexpected positives. Many teens find their parents are actually happier after the divorce or they may develop new and better ways of relating to both parents when they have separate time with each one.

Some teens learn compassion and caring skills when a younger brother or sister needs their support and care. Siblings who are closer in age may form tighter bonds, learning to count on each other more because they're facing the challenges of their parents' divorce together. Coping well with divorce can also bring out strength and maturity. Some being more responsible, better problem solvers, better listeners or better friends. Looking back on the experience, lots of people say they learned coping skills they never knew they had and feel stronger and more resilient as a result of what they went through.

Many movies have been made about divorce and stepfamilies – some with happy endings, some not. That's how it is in real life too. But most teens who go through a divorce learn (sometimes to their surprise) that they can make it through the difficult situation successfully. Giving it time, letting others support you along the way and keeping an eye on the good things in your life can make all the difference.

You may feel...

If your parents are separated, in the process of getting divorced, or recently divorced, it is normal for you to be experiencing many different feelings. Even if your parents were divorced a while ago, it is still normal to have strong feelings about it. Some common feelings or emotions are:

- Shock or surprise
- Anxiety – you may worry what is going to happen to you and who will take care of you
- Sadness and a feeling of loss
- Anger – you may be angry at your parents or you may feel angry in general
- Fear – if one of your parents leave, you may be afraid of losing your other parent
- Guilt – you may feel that it's your fault that your parents split
- Loneliness – you may feel that you have no one to talk to or that no one understands what you are going through
- Worry – you may worry about your own ability to have a good relationship or marriage in the future

You may also feel:

- Relieved because there is less stress at home
- Happy to have special alone time with each parent

Dealing with your Parents' Divorce



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Divorce

For many people, their parents' divorce marks a turning point in their lives, whether the divorce happened years ago or is taking place right now. About half the marriages in the United States end in divorce, so children of divorce are certainly not alone. But when it happens to you, you can feel very alone and unsure of what it all means. It may seem hard, but it is possible to cope with divorce— and have a good family life in spite of some changes divorce may bring.

Why are my parents divorcing?

Parents divorce for many reasons. Usually divorce happens when couples feel they can no longer live together due to fighting and anger or because the love they had when they married has changed. Divorce can also be because one parent falls in love with someone else, and sometimes its due to a serious problem like drinking, gambling or abuse.

It's common for teens to think that their parents' divorce is somehow their fault, but nothing could be further from the truth. Some teens may wonder if they could've done something to help prevent the split. Others may wish they had prevented arguments by cooperating more within the family, doing better with their behavior or getting better grades. But separation and divorce are a result of a couple's problems with each other, not with their kids. The decisions adults make about divorce are their own.

If your parents are divorcing, you may feel a lot of feelings. Your emotions may change frequently too.

You may feel angry, frustrated, upset, or sad. You might feel protective of one parent or blame one for the situation. You may feel abandoned, afraid, worried or guilty. You may also feel relieved, especially if there has been a lot of tension at home. These feelings are normal and talking about them with a friend, family member or trusted adult can help.

How will divorce change my life?

Depending on what happens in your family, you may have to adjust to many changes. These could include things like moving, changing schools, spending time with both parents separately, and perhaps dealing with parents' unpleasant feelings towards one another.

Your parents may go to court to determine custody arrangements. You may end up living with one parent most of the time and visiting the other or your parents may split their time with you evenly.

Some teens have to travel between parents, and that may create challenges both socially and practically. But with time you can create a new routine that works. Often, it takes quite a while for custody arrangements to be finalized. This can give people time to adjust to these big changes and let families figure out what works best.

Money matters may change for your parents, too. A parent who didn't work during the marriage may need to find a job to pay for rent or a mortgage. This may be something a parent

is excited about, but he or she may also feel nervous or pressured about money. There are also expenses associated with divorce, from lawyers' fees to the cost of moving to a new place to live.

Your family may not be able to afford all the things you did before the divorce. This is one of the difficult changes often associated with divorce. There can be good changes too— but how you cope with the stressful changes depends on your situation, your personality and your support network.

What parents and teens can do to make divorce easier.

Keep the peace. Dealing with divorce is easiest when parents get along. Teens find it especially hard when parents fight and argue or act with bitterness towards each other.

Keep in touch. Going back and forth between two homes can be tough, especially if parents live far apart. It can be a good idea to keep in touch with a parent you see less often because of distance. Even a quick e-mail saying, "I'm thinking of you," helps ease the feelings of missing each other. Making an effort to stay in touch when you're apart can keep both of you up to date on everyday activities and ideas.

Work it out. You may want both parents to come to a special events like games, meetings, plays, recitals, etc. But sometimes a parent may find it awkward to attend if the other parent is there also. It helps if parents can figure out way to make this work, especially because you may need to feel the support and presence of both parents even more during divorce. You might be able to come up with an idea for a compromise or a solution to this problem and suggest it to your parents.