

Help for Broken Hearts in Broken Homes

By Connie Wilson

When happily ever after is suddenly interrupted by parents ending their marriage in divorce, the world of a child transforms. Their reliable, safe haven called home turns into a tenuous place full of fear, doubt and confusion. Often, even the most concerned parents become consumed by their own emotional turmoil. And some parents are so involved in their own emotional upset, they leave children to figure things out for themselves.

During a divorce, most children must deal with intense emotional turmoil from the perspective of a helpless observer. But young people can benefit if their feelings are at least acknowledged and understood by parents and other concerned adults. These feelings and concerns may fluctuate in intensity as the days and months go by.

Shock – The shock of a divorce can numb a child's feelings, protecting him/her from the overwhelming sadness and confusion before them. The shock can last for a long or short time and can reappear whenever chaos strikes. It also masks the child's pain from others. When a child appears to be taking a divorce well, it is important to remember they are still grappling with endless questions that reach the core of their being: Where will I live? Where will my parents, brothers, sisters, pets live? What about holidays,

birthdays and sport events? What about our summer camping trip?

Loss – In a divorce, children face sudden, immeasurable and unexpected losses. The children go back and forth between parents' homes and have their lives uprooted on a regular basis. In doing so, they are constantly reminded that the thing they miss most is their other parent. They face the loss of life as they've known it – and an uncertain future.

Anger – Having to endure change is at the root of much anger. Children don't want their parents to divorce, they don't want to move, they don't want to see only one parent at a time, and they don't want to be in the middle of their parents' ongoing feuds. Sadness often results in anger, perhaps as a self-protection mechanism that allows a child to direct emotions outward rather than inward. If gentle understanding and relating to their fears doesn't help, it may be a good time to seek professional help.

Worry – A child with limited worries prior to divorce suddenly faces worries of insurmountable proportion. When will I see Mom and Dad? Will they be fighting? Who will pick me up from school? Children can worry so much that they lose their ability to think clearly or concentrate in school.

Shame – Some children feel so ashamed about their parents divorce, they don't even talk to their best friends about it. This isolates them from the help they need to move through the situation healthfully. Others may be motivated by their mortification to seek out other kids with divorced parents. This way they get a realistic view of the situation, are likely to begin to feel that things are not as dreadful as they originally feared and generate a new support system.

Relief – Some children may feel relief when their parents separate, especially if they have been exposed to persistent fighting or violence.

It is only speculation, not supported by scientific studies, but respect seems to be the key issue in helping kids to feel safe during and after a divorce. A broken home doesn't necessarily mean the children's hearts have to be broken. They will certainly be tender at first, and how we approach our children and our ex-spouse will affect how quickly and how well our children adjust.

If you know a young person who is having a difficult time during a divorce, contact your employee assistance program.

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Inexpensive Life Insurance

Alcohol represents the biggest part of the nation's substance abuse struggle. According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), nearly 14 million Americans — 7.4% of the population — meet the clinicians' definition for alcohol abuse or alcoholism. Several million more adults engage in risky drinking patterns that could lead to alcohol problems.

Mixing alcohol and driving is serious business. In 1997, alcohol-related automobile crashes killed more than 16,000 people—an average of one death every 32 minutes. In addition, an estimated one million more people are injured each

year in alcohol-related crashes. About three out of every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related traffic crash at some point in their lives. Fatal traffic crashes, the leading cause of death for those aged five through 24, involved alcohol four times out of 10.

The most effective precaution is to not drink and drive and to not ride with a person who has been drinking. The money you spend on a cab ride could be the least expensive life insurance policy you'll ever purchase.

Sources: Alcohol Health Research World; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; US Department of Labor.

Redefining the Problem

When a stressful situation arises, stop and think about it — literally. Studies have shown that we can train our minds to regard an event negatively or positively.

So when you feel your pulse and breathing quicken and your blood pressure rising, take a deep breath and focus on redefining the problem. In *Resilience: Discovering A New Strength at Times of Stress* (Ballantine Books), Dr. Frederic Flach advises against dwelling on a situation's negative impact on you. The problem is already there, so don't get hooked into "would-a, could-a, should-a" thinking or blaming.

Rather, he says, turn your mind to finding a remedy for the problem or a way to avoid it in the future. Here are

some examples:

Redefining a relationship problem: "She and I can't have a conversation without fighting. Why can't we communicate easily?" may be redefined as, "What can we do to respect each other's thoughts and feelings?" In the first question, the person asking it is convinced there's a communication breakdown. The "redefinition" question, however, looks for solutions and room for growth.

Redefining stress: "I never have enough time — my spouse wants me to attend to things at home, the kids want me here, the boss wants me there. How can I ever manage it all?" might be redefined as, "What's important to

me? What do I like doing most of all or what do I need to do most of all?" The second line of questioning is an honest inquiry into what you can and cannot accomplish within your limits. Whereas trying to manage it all only makes it more stressful. Asking yourself how you can improve the situation opens the door for a successful solution.

Redefining a work situation: "This is the worst it's ever been. How can anyone work under these conditions?" may be turned to, "How can I take care of myself? What can I do to make this time easier for me?"

Just by taking a different look at a situation, we may be able to guard against disabling ourselves from the effects of stress. Think positively.

10 People Who Made It Big Despite A Rocky Start

Louisa May Alcott was told by an editor she'd never write anything popular. More than a century later, *Little Women* is considered one of the best American children's books of the past 200 years.

Florence Chadwick, the first woman to swim the English Channel, also attempted to be the first woman to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast. Caught in thick fog, she had to abandon her try, but only two months later she succeeded, beating the men's record by two hours.

Louis Freeman, the first African-American chief airline pilot, tried to join the Air Force after graduating from college but failed the required test. Not used to

failing, he took the test again and passed.

Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor because "he had no good ideas."

Charles Goodyear was sent to debtor's prison before he discovered the process that revolutionized the rubber industry.

John James Audubon, the renowned naturalist artist, was roundly criticized for frolics in the woods instead of going to school. Later, he bankrupted the family business.

John F. Kennedy Jr. had to take the New York bar exam three times before he passed.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, founders of Apple Computer, tried to sell the rights to their personal computer to a Hewlett Packard executive, who told them, "We don't need you. You haven't got through college yet."

Michael Jordan didn't make the varsity basketball team as a sophomore in high school.

Abraham Lincoln started out as a captain at the beginning of the Blackhawk War. By the end of the war, he had been demoted to private.

Source: Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good? By Miriam Adderholdt, PhD, and Jan Goldberg (Minneapolis, Minn.: Free Spirit Publishing, 1999); and Southern Living magazine, August 1999.



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