

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

- Show your child physical affection and assure them that they are still loved, and you are both still their parents.
- Provide your child simple but accurate information about what is going on.
- If you and the co-parent are living apart, be sure that both of you visit your child regularly and consistently.
- Keep your child away from conflicts between you and your co-parent.
- Keep your promises. If you have agreed to meet your child at a certain time, stick to it.



Additionally, for older children

- Be in touch with what is going on in your children's life (e.g. school exams and peer relationships) and support them.
- Allow your child to spend time with the co-parent and other significant family members.

HOW RELATIVES CAN HELP

- Be patient with the children. Avoid saying "stop it" or "forget it" if they are expressing their emotions or asking questions.
- Stay neutral. Do not take sides.
- Avoid telling them their parents' problems.



SIGNS FOR WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- When the child shows worrying behaviours like withdrawal, sadness, anxiousness, or a sudden disinterest in activities that they used to enjoy.
- When the child expresses intent or displays behaviours to harm themselves or others (e.g. self-mutilation or saying "I wish I weren't here", "Nobody would care if I die").
- When the child's daily functioning (e.g. sleeping, eating or going to school) is affected for a period of time.

This list is not exhaustive. Reach out to a professional for help if you have concerns about how a child is doing.

HELP FOR FAMILIES IS AVAILABLE

Strengthening Families Programme@Family Service Centre (FAM@FSC) aims to support couples who may face greater challenges in their marriage, and families showing early signs of stress. Support programmes are also available for children from divorcing or divorced families to cope with their family situation.

Children of Divorce Intervention Programme (CODIP)

- To minimise the negative effects of divorce on children whose parents are divorcing or have divorced
- For children 7-12 years old
- 6 sessions of 2 hours each

Children-in-Between Programme (CiB Children)

- For children (6-15 years old) caught in-between the conflicts of their divorced parents
- 3 sessions of 2 hours each

Children-in-Between Programme for Parents (CiB Parents)

- For parents who are divorcing or have divorced
- 2 sessions of 2 hours each

There are 10* FAM@FSCs across Singapore. Scan the QR code or find your nearest centre from the Ministry of Social and Family Development website: www.msf.gov.sg/FAMatFSC

For those living in or near Hougang, Serangoon or Sengkang, please reach out to MWS FAM@FSC by phone at 6330 1080 (office hours) or by email at fam@mws.sg.

*Accurate as of 2024



Untying the Knot: Impact of Divorce on Children (7-12 years)





Divorce affects the whole family. Parents have to cope with their own feelings and the practical matters involving the separation. Children too have to navigate this turbulent time. This guide aims to provide some advice and resources to better support children of divorcing or divorced parents to reduce the impact of the divorce and foster resilience.

CHILDREN'S REACTION

For younger primary school children, parents are the core of their existence. At this age, they may blame themselves for the divorce. They may be able to express their feelings more easily, compared to preschool or kindergarten-aged children, but it is still very difficult for them to understand fully the reasons behind their parents' divorce.

For older primary school children, this is the time they begin to understand the concept of morals. If they obey "moral rules" but parents break them, they become confused and conflicted. At this age, children may be experiencing a lot of negative emotions, which they are not able to express and manage adequately, due to the lack of skills and language abilities or inability to comprehend the situation.



The following are some ways children may react in a divorce. Each child is different and may not always exhibit these behaviours.

BEHAVIOURALLY

Younger children may

- Cry frequently due to fear of abandonment
- Take sides with one parent and reject the other
- Behave aggressively to stop the conflict, get attention, or distract either parent
- Show a decreased attention span in class which may lead to poorer academic performance

Older children may

- Take sides with one parent and blame or reject the other
- Offer to care for the "vulnerable" parent
- Do poorly in school and studies

PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Younger children may

- Believe that the leaving parent no longer loves or wants them
- Suffer grief and lowered self-esteem

Older children may

- Experience low self-esteem, loneliness and anger
- Feel shame and embarrassment about the divorce

SOCIALLY

Younger children may

- Feel shame when they see their friends' intact families or see both their parents show up for school events
- Show changes in their interactions and responses to their friends, such as withdrawal, anger, changes in social circle, etc.

Older children may

- Begin to spend more time with friends than with family

THINGS TO AVOID

- Buying excessive gifts for your child. This can be misunderstood by your child and cause unintended effects. Do not compete with the other parent in showering your child with material gifts.
- Using your child to pass messages to your ex-spouse. They may feel stressed or feel used. Avoid involving your child in matters that do not concern them.
- Using your child as a "spy" to get information about your ex-spouse. Your child may feel conflicted whether to divulge details about your co-parent. This may strain relationships between you and your child, or your child and the co-parent.
- Taking your child's difficult behaviour personally. Understand that your child may be having a hard time as well.
- Bad-mouthing the co-parent. Your child may feel that you are criticising them too. They may feel a need to take sides between you and your co-parent. Remind your family members not to bad-mouth the co-parent too.
- Comparing your child to the co-parent. E.g. "You are just like your mother". Children may hear criticisms of the other parent as criticisms of themselves.
- Relying on your child for emotional and psychological support. If you need someone to talk to, consider approaching your friends or getting professional help.

