

TO: Mrs. Clinton

FROM: MaryEllen McGuire

RE: **The Effects of Divorce on Children**

DATE: January 28, 2000

Two of the latest studies on the effects of divorce on children suggest that divorce may in fact *not* create damaging, immediate and lasting effects.

University of Iowa Study (1999)

While past research has shown that divorce is a main contributor to adverse behavior in children, a University of Iowa study has recently found that the actual negative effects of divorce on children are widely stereotyped and not nearly as uniform as believed. While the study *did* find that children of divorce are twice as likely to exhibit behavioral and emotional adjustment problems while growing up, the vast majority of children of divorce do just fine. The key to adjustment problems is not the divorce itself, but the quality of parenting post-divorce *and* the gender of the child. If parents become depressed, drop out of their children's lives, or engage in constant, hostile exchanges, children are likely to exhibit antisocial behaviors. If parents remain engaged, practice good parenting and avoid hostile exchanges, girls and boys are apt to be fine, though boys seem to be more generally affected by divorce even under optimal conditions.

Specific findings of the study include:

- The quality of a custodial mother's parenting and the father's involvement in parenting are key indicators in boy's antisocial behavior; mother's parenting and post-divorce conflict increase a girl's risk of antisocial behavior.
- Pre-divorce conflict increases the chance of depression in boys while post-divorce conflict elevates a girl's risk for conduct problems.
- The quality of a father's parenting after divorce has little effect on girl's antisocial behavioral. Mom's parenting is the most consequential factor.
- Active engagement in the role of parent by a non-custodial father substantially reduces the risk that boys will display conduct problems.
- Divorce is more emotionally disturbing for boys than girls. Boys exhibit higher rates of depression even when their mothers continue to be strong, nurturing parents.
- Conflict is not as destructive for kids in two parent families as long as it doesn't spill over into quality of parenting.

University of Utah Study (1999)

According to a University of Utah study, children of divorced parents are less likely to end their own marriages, than their predecessors of the 1970's. Before 1975, people from divorced families were 2.5 times more likely to have dissolved marriages than their counterparts from intact marriages. By 1996, that likelihood had slipped to just 1.4. One explanation may be that divorce has become more socially acceptable over the past 20 years and no longer takes such a strong toll on children. Without such heavy emotional baggage, these children are better equipped to succeed at their own marriages. Another factor is declining marriage rates. Today's

young adults, and children of divorce in particular, are less likely to marry and disproportionately likely to live with their partners - causing no need for divorce.

2ND STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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University Wire

December 3, 1999

LENGTH: 530 words

HEADLINE: Iowa State U. study questions effects of divorce on children

BYLINE: By Megan Hinds, Iowa State Daily

SOURCE: Iowa State U.

DATELINE: Ames, Iowa

BODY:

A recent study conducted by researchers at Iowa State University has shown that divorce may not create the damaging, lasting effects on children as previously thought.

The study, "Explaining the Higher Incidence of Adjustment Problems Among Children of Divorce Compared to Those in Intact Families," was conducted by researchers at Iowa State's Department of Sociology and Institute for Social and Behavioral Research. It was reported in the November edition of the Journal of Marriage and the Family.

The research examines all the major factors associated with divorce and child development problems, including loss of family income, parental conflict, psychological adjustment and parenting practices of the custodial parent, as well as the involvement of the non-custodial father.

"Other previous studies have considered only one or two of these important factors," said Robert M. Milardo, editor of the journal.

Past research has shown that divorce is a main contributor to adverse behavior in children, such as lower academic achievement, early entry into sexual activity, substance abuse and delinquency.

Although the study found that the actual negative effects of divorce on children are often widely stereotyped and not as common as many believe, they still exist.

"Children of divorced households have an almost doubled chance for behavioral and emotional adjustment problems," said Ronald L. Simons, head author of the study and professor of sociology. "Our study found, however, that most children do not show any lasting negative effects in adult life."

Researchers focused on two dimensions of child adjustment for the study: whether children externalized problems, displaying delinquent or violent behavior, or if they internalized their anxiety, showing depression and other emotional distress. These dimensions varied depending on gender.

Among all children, girls were more likely to experience depression, while boys were more likely to display conduct problems.

*Effects of divorce on
children*

The research in this study also showed that the absence of a father in the home increases boys' chances of becoming depressed as well.

"The father's departure from the household has a great impact upon a child's emotional state," Simons said. "Fathers can counteract this by remaining supportive and involved in the child's life."

The role of the father may change after a divorce as well, according to the study. Fathers may give up their parenting role and replace it with a role that is more like an adult friend or "buddy."

Researchers discovered that non-residential fathers were less likely to enforce discipline, solve problems and discuss standards of conduct with their children. The study also said divorced mothers were inclined to make fewer demands on their children and have less productive disciplinary reactions to their children's behavior than married mothers.

These findings are part of ISU's Transitions Project, a longitudinal study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. The study followed 328 two-parent Iowa households and 206 divorced households headed by mothers during the past decade, Simons said.

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The Des Moines Register

November 20, 1999, Saturday

SECTION: Metro Iowa Pg.5

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HEADLINE: Study on divorce offers positive news
If parented well, kids are no more at risk than those in two-parent families,
the study says.

BYLINE: Jennifer Dukes Lee

SOURCE: Ames News Bureau

BODY:

By JENNIFER DUKES LEE
Register's Ames Bureau

Ames, Ia. - Children can adjust to divorce if mothers and fathers continue good parenting after they break up, according to a new study by an Iowa State University researcher.

The message, according to ISU sociologist Ronald Simons, is that many children from divorced families do just fine -as long as the parents are civil and supportive.

The study will appear in the Monday edition of the Journal of Marriage and the Family.

Simons' research will probably be controversial. It is a departure from earlier research that said divorce has negative, long-lasting effects on children, said Robert Milardo, the journal's editor.

"I think the main point of this study is that the effects of divorce on children aren't necessarily negative," Milardo said. "There will be people who will not like this."

Simons said divorced parents can substantially reduce developmental problems in their children if they practice good parenting and avoid hostile exchanges.

However, boys of divorced parents remain at risk for depression even under the most optimal conditions, Simons said.

Simons, who was in Canada Friday, was not available for comment.

In an interview with the journal, he said: "What is essential for kids is that they be parented well. If Mom and Dad continue to persevere in their parenting . . . the risk for conduct problems is no greater than in two- parent families. This is a more optimistic scenario than is often asserted."

To prevent problems in their children, parents must be warm, supportive and consistent in discipline, Simons said.

The latest findings are part of ISU's Transitions Project, a long-term study supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. For the past decade, the researchers have followed about 600 families, both married and divorced.

The study says divorce can disrupt quality parenting if the custodial mother becomes depressed with new time demands and financial stress.

Simons adds that fathers should not relinquish their parental role to form "buddy" relationships with their children, he said. That can increase conduct problems in their sons.

Larry Breheny, executive director of Catholic Charities, said much of the study makes sense.

"So much depends on how supportive and cooperative and attentive parents are to the children" after divorce, Breheny said.

Breheny cautioned parents from now assuming that their children can breeze through a family break-up.

Divorce frequently ends bitterly, he said.

"The idea of a peaceful, cooperative divorce is in many ways a rare thing," Breheny said.

Reporter Jennifer Dukes Lee can be reached at (515) 232-2383 or dukesleej@news.dmreg.com

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American Demographics

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HEADLINE: The Consequences of Divorce

BYLINE: J. L.

BODY:

Children of divorced parents are less likely to end their own marriages today than their predecessors were back in the early 1970s. Before 1975, new research finds, people from divorced families were 2.5 times more likely to have dissolved their marriages than their counterparts from intact families. By 1996, the likelihood had slipped to just 1.4, says Nicholas Wolfinger, professor at the University of Utah and author of the 1999 study, "Coupling and Uncoupling: Changing Marriage Patterns and the Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce."

One explanation, which Wolfinger confirms in his research, is that the negative effects of divorce on children are weakening. Divorce has become more socially acceptable in the past 20 years and no longer takes such a strong toll on kids, he explains. Without such heavy emotional baggage, children are better equipped to succeed in their own marriages.

But there's another factor at work: declining marriage rates among children of divorce. Wolfinger used data from the General Social Survey, a random sample of 22,000 individuals that's been conducted annually or biennially by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago since 1972. Respondents from divorced families in 1973 were 36 percent more likely to marry than those from intact families. By 1994, they were slightly less likely to marry, perhaps reflecting their declining faith in the institution of marriage.

Look closer at the results for various age groups, however, and other patterns emerge. Children of divorce who were younger than 20 years old had very high rates of marriage, both in 1973 and 1994. Children who were older than 20 followed a very different course -- in 1973, they had the same marriage rates as their peers who grew up in two-parent households. In 1994, they were 26 percent less likely to get hitched than people from intact families. Wolfinger also notes that demographic variables, such as educational attainment, race, gender, and presence of siblings, do not affect the relationship between parental divorce and getting married.

One reason for the decline in marriage rates, Wolfinger suggests, is an increase in cohabitation. Additional research has shown that children of divorce are disproportionately likely to live with their partner -- and less likely to ever marry them. "Divorce rates for people from divorced families and for people from intact families will never converge," Wolfinger says. "They'll come close, but most of the time, divorce will still be hard on kids."



Pediatrician's Role in Helping Children and Families Deal With Separation and Divorce (RE9419)

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health

Each year over 1 million children experience divorce, but many pediatricians may only learn of this agonizing crisis from their patient's behavioral reaction or if the family, as a consequence of the divorce, moves to a different community. Since the average length of marriages that end in divorce is just under 7 years, many of the children affected are young. The combination of out-of-wedlock births and divorce will result in 61% of all children living with a single parent.[1,2]

Divorce may be a solution to a discordant marriage and any decrease in intrafamilial hostility may be constructive; however, for many children, the tensions continue and the entire divorce process is a long, searing experience. Divorce is the termination of the family unit, and, like termination of any important relationship, it is often characterized by painful losses.[3] Approximately half of all children do not see their father after divorce and few have spent a night at their father's home in the past month.[4]

The divorce itself is usually only the first of a series of major changes in the lives of affected children. Their sense of loss is ongoing and may re-emerge especially on holidays, birthdays, special school events, and when attempting to integrate multiple new family relationships.

The custodial parent may have to start work or work longer hours, the family may have to move to a new community, and there may be secondary losses of relatives, local friends, and a familiar school. The family home may have to be sold. Mothers, much more than fathers, face a substantially lower standard of living and divorce drives some into poverty.[1]

Studies indicate that up to half of children manifest a symptomatic response during the first year after parents' divorce. Clinically most troublesome is aggression in school-age boys and depression in early- and mid-adolescent girls. Risk factors that contribute to 10% of children continuing to have difficulty for more than a year include ongoing parental discord, maternal depression, other psychiatric disorders in either parent, and poverty. Long-term follow-up studies, although methodologically difficult, indicate that divorce may delay or limit children's capacity for intimacy and commitment as young adults.[5-7]

RISKS OF DIVORCE FOR CHILDREN

The clinical manifestations of divorce in children are dependent on multiple variables.[8,9] What are the parents' abilities, in the midst of their own anger and loss, to focus on their children's feelings and needs? What was the predivorce level of psychosocial functioning? A major factor is the age of the child.[10,11]

* Children under the age of 3 years may reflect their caretaker's preoccupation, grieving, and distress; they may respond with irritability, crying, fearfulness, separation anxiety, sleep problems, aggressive behavior, or regression in developmental skills.

- * Children at 4 to 5 years of age often blame themselves for the absence or unhappiness of parents and are highly vulnerable concerning their own self-worth.
- * School-age children may be moody, preoccupied, daydream, have tantrums, or be overly aggressive. They are at an age when they can begin to understand more realistically what is going on and can often express their sadness and their wish for parents to get back together. Their school performance may suffer, and they may agonize over their divided loyalty.
- * Adolescents may develop a premature degree of emotional autonomy as a way of dealing with feelings about the divorce. In this often-rapid process, the adolescent may need to de-idealize each parent. Angry feelings may emerge as aggression, antisocial behavior, or substance abuse. Some may feel acutely lonely and depend excessively on peers or a sexual relationship for comfort. The teenager who can strategically withdraw from the crisis, yet still derive emotional support from both parents, seems to fare best.[11]
- * At all ages, psychosomatic complaints may be an unconscious solution to feelings of anger or loss that are raised by the divorce.
- * Some children will test limits and family rules in an effort to reunite their parents. Others may play one parent off against the other to gain power over a situation that feels out of control.

PEDIATRICIANS' ROLE

Unfortunately, pediatricians are often not aware that one of their patients is experiencing the effects of divorce. The pediatrician may learn of the divorce only through a dispute regarding which parent should pay a recent medical bill, through a change of address, or because one parent may attempt to use the pediatrician's testimony to gain an advantage over the other parent in court. In a survey of parents, only 7% identified pediatricians as a resource during divorce.[12]

Because of the considerable prevalence and morbidity of divorce and the opportunity for effective early intervention to protect children from adverse circumstances, pediatricians can support children and families by integrating a simple screening question into their health supervision visit interview, such as, "How are you and your husband getting along . . . is there tension that affects the children?" The emotional implications of divorce are so profound that efforts at intervention are always justified. Referral for marital counseling at an early point in the discord may either prevent divorce or, if a divorce does occur, protect the children from ongoing hostility or being used by one parent against the other.

Knowledge about parental discord or divorce may initiate a protocol to assess the following:

- * The child's acute reaction
- * The parents' level of hostility
- * The parents' capacity to meet the child's physical and emotional needs
- * Indications of parental depression or other serious psychiatric disorder
- * The visitation arrangements and the effect on the child of the continuing relationship with each parent
- * Periodic assessment of the child's adjustment and psychosocial functioning among peers and in school

The pediatrician should recognize that divorce is a several-year process that includes initially increasing marital discord; then separation; a lengthy, sometimes hostile, court process; a final decree; and finally both an acute and a chronic period of adjustment.[13,14] Just as with death, there is a period of initial denial or disbelief, a gradual acceptance, a readjustment, and redefinition of the family unit. For parents who can not give up the fight, divorce may last even longer as court battles concerning money and custody can last throughout childhood and adolescence.

Once the separation and divorce process has been initiated, the pediatrician can help parents understand their child's reactions, fears, need for information, and best interests in the context of the child's age and developmental level. Parents should be encouraged to discuss with their children the divorce process, share appropriately some of their own questions and concerns, and during quiet, private moments, ask the child what questions they have about any aspect of what is happening to the family.

In contentious situations, the parents' anger may result in the child being used by one parent against the other, serving as a messenger because the parents are incapable of communicating directly, or suffering for lack of financial support. The pediatrician should be careful not to take sides in a divorce dispute unless there is clear, persuasive, firsthand evidence that one parent is unfit to care for the child. However, the more common circumstance is that the parent with the best relationship to the pediatrician will ask that a letter be written to the court that supports through secondhand information or hearsay the

contentions of this parent against the other. In most circumstances, the pediatrician should refuse such requests, maintain an appropriate relationship with both parents, and advocate for the child to be protected from parental hostility. In complex legal situations, the pediatrician should consult with his or her own attorney.

Joint custody is designed to keep both parents (especially fathers) involved in the child's care and development; however, despite worthy goals, joint custody also means ongoing, regular contact between two often quite angry individuals who must separate their feelings about each other as spouses from their roles as parents. The specifics of custody arrangements are complex and depend on the number and ages of the children, how far apart parents live, scheduling needs such as sports teams or lessons, etc. The pediatrician should clarify who has the right to medical information and should specifically ask about any joint physical or legal custody agreements. Joint legal custody is relevant to coordinating medical care and assures that both parents must give consent and be informed about their child's medical needs. Joint physical custody necessitates an often fairly complex schedule and close coordination between the parents.

When a child is seriously ill or hospitalized, the pediatrician may have to be especially diligent in communicating with both parents. Withholding medical information from one parent is not often in the patient's best interests.

Pediatricians should serve anticipatory and advisory functions. Some with special interests and training may have enough parents experiencing marital tension or divorce that they can lead or arrange for counseling services in their practice setting. Having a mental health professional available in their office or clinic, providing reading materials, and leading small group discussions for parents and/or for children concerning the impact of divorce would all be helpful. If a family is in the process of divorce, it is recommended that the pediatrician monitor the situation at intervals appropriate to the age of the child and particular circumstances. If he or she sees that the patient is at risk because of poor adjustment, dysfunction in major developmental tasks, ongoing hostility, parental psychopathology, etc, then the pediatrician should extend the evaluation and treatment process and, if indicated, be a resource for community services. Pediatricians with an interest and experience in counseling may set aside an extended appointment time or develop parent groups within the practice in order to assess the effects on children of a separation or divorce. Other options include a recommendation for court-based or court-ordered counseling, a mental health evaluation for the child's and/or parents' emotional needs, services of an independent mediator for parental disputes, and community-based groups for divorce discussion or therapy groups. Referring early in the divorce process often has the most success because parents may be more receptive to their children's needs before legal issues, preoccupations with finances or feelings of loss become overwhelming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, divorce is so common and such a critical experience for children that pediatricians should ask about family and marital discord periodically during well-child visits. For many families, pediatricians may be the only readily accessible professional with expertise in the psychosocial aspects of child and family health. If there is rising tension, separation, or divorce, the pediatrician has a responsibility to make an assessment of the family's and the child's resources, help family members avoid or contain an adversarial relationship, and function as an advocate for the child, assisting parents in discovering what they can do to diminish the stress and to act in the best interest of their child.

COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, 1993-1994

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Focus on Kids: The Effects of Divorce on Children

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Parents who are going through divorce often believe it is in the best interest of the children to shield them from the stress of the situation. But regardless of their parents' good intentions, children often find themselves caught in an emotional whirlpool during these times. Instead of protection, they need support and reassurance. This guide will help you understand the stress that children often feel when their parents divorce.

A common understanding

Parents dealing with a divorce want to protect their children from the same stress and anguish they feel. But avoiding the issue only adds to the stress. Parents need to help their children understand that the family will learn to adapt to new schedules, new environments, and new ways of communicating. Only then will progress be made to relieve some of the accompanying stress.

Individual adult reactions to divorce and separation vary. Children's reactions vary also depending on:

- The amount of involvement with the non-residential parent,
- The situation prior to the divorce/separation,
- The custodial parent's ease in adjusting to the divorce,
- Parenting skills of both parents, agreement on child rearing, discipline,
- Approval and love from both parents,
- Openness to discussing the divorce with parents,
- Degree of conflict between parents,
- Economic hardship,
- Other added stressors (moving, changing schools, parental remarriage).

What causes stress for children?

1. **The family they have always known will be different.**

One of the biggest fears for children is change. With divorce, changes will occur in many household responsibilities. Who is expected to do what at home may change. Children may have to adjust to new schedules, new homework, mealtime and bedtime routines. They may no longer have contact with some friends and extended family members (such as grandparents or cousins).

2. **Loss of attachment.**

Children become attached to parents, brothers, sisters and pets. Changes in how much contact occurs with any of these can cause some distress. Having a different bedroom and being away from familiar possessions also creates stress.

3. **Fear of abandonment.**

Children fear that if they have lost one parent, they may lose the other. They may blame themselves, feel unlovable, or not feel safe. They worry about who will take care of them and even who will pick them up from child care or after school.

4. **Hostility between parents.**

Arguments and tension between parents may make children feel guilty, angry and alone. Trying to make the children take sides or turn against the other parent creates confusion for the children.

and places them in the middle of an adult struggle. It is important to let the children make up their own minds about their parents.

Children's reactions to stress may vary from relief and complete acceptance to great sadness, anger or anxiety. You will see signs of their stress in many of their words and actions.

See Table 1 for descriptions of typical reactions and suggestions for how you can help them cope.

Table 1.

Infants
What the child understands • Does not understand conflict, but may react to changes in parents' energy level and mood. Possible child reactions • Loss of appetite. • Upset stomach — may spit up more. More fretful or anxious. Strategies for parents • Keep normal routines. • Remain calm in front of the baby. • Get help from family and friends. • Rest when the child rests. • Maintain warm, safe contact. • Do not deprive the child of his/her favorite toys, blanket or stuffed animal.
Toddlers
What the child understands • Understands that a parent has moved away, but doesn't understand why. Possible child reactions • More crying, clinging. • Problems sleeping. • Regression to infant behaviors. • May feel anger, may not understand why he/she feels that way. • May worry when parent is out of sight. • May withdraw, bite or be irritable. Strategies for parents • Stick to routines. • Be reassuring, nurturing. • Allow some return to infantile behaviors, but set clear limits. • Try not to be in a hurry all the time. • Spend time alone with the child (cuddle, read). • Give child time with another responsive adult (grandparent, close friend).
Preschoolers
What the child understands

- Doesn't understand what separation or divorce means. Realizes one parent is not as active in their lives.

Possible child reactions

- Pleasant and unpleasant fantasies.
- Feels uncertain about the future.
- May feel responsible.
- May hold anger inside.
- Feels that he/she should be punished.
- May be accident prone.
- May become aggressive and angry toward parent he/she lives with.
- May have more nightmares.
- Experiences feelings of grief because of sudden absence of parent.

Strategies for parents

- Encourage your child to talk.
- Use books to help your child talk about feelings.
- Set aside "child time" each day.
- Tell child repeatedly that he/she is not responsible for the divorce and that he/she will be taken care of.
- Tell your child he/she will be safe.
- Let noncustodial parent maintain a regular presence (a phone call several times each week, messages sent on video or audio tapes).
- Assure your child that he/she will be able to visit with the other parent.
- Allow more unhurried time every day.

Early elementary

What the child understands

- Begins to understand what a divorce is and understands that her/his parents won't live together anymore and that they don't love each other.

Possible child reactions

- Feels deceived and feels a sense of loss.
- Hopes parents will get back together.
- Feels rejected by the parent who left.
- Ignores school and friendships.
- Worries about the future.
- Fears nobody will be there to pick him/her up from school.
- Complains of headaches or stomachaches.
- Has trouble sleeping.
- Tries to recreate "what was."
- Experiences loss of appetite, sleep problems, diarrhea, urinary frequency.

Strategies for parents

- Encourage your child to talk about how he/she feels.
- Answer all questions about the changes, and keep lines of communication open.
- Be sensitive to signs of depression and fear — seek professional help if depression is prolonged or intense.
- See if the school or community has special programs for children of divorce.
- Plan special time together.
- Reassure your child that everything will be OK, just different.

- Keep daily routines intact.
- Respect, but monitor, your child's privacy.
- Don't dwell on adult problems.
- Encourage your child to say how he/she feels, but don't use expressions such as, "be brave" or "don't cry."

Preteens and adolescents

What the child understands

- Understands but doesn't accept the divorce.

Possible child reactions

- Feels angry and disillusioned.
- Feels abandoned, that parent is leaving him/her not the other spouse.
- Tries to take advantage of parents' low energy and high stress levels.
- Tries to take control over family.
- Shows extreme behavior (good and bad).
- Becomes moralistic, or becomes involved in high-risk behaviors (drugs, shoplifting, skipping school).
- Tries to be an "angel," to bring the family back together.
- Tries to cut one or both parents out of her/his life.
- Feels as if he/she will never be able to have a long-term relationship.
- Feels like he/she must grow up too soon.
- Worries about financial matters.

Strategies for parents

- Continue to talk about each step.
- Maintain two-way communication.
- Keep routines, maintain rules.
- Remind your child who "owns" the problem, and free him/her from guilt.
- Continue to monitor your child's activities.
- Don't involve your child in parental struggles.
- Don't use your child as a replacement partner, (don't discuss adult problems with him/her).
- Consider joint counseling.

More strategies for parents

Books

Children often can deal with feelings by relating to characters in a story. If a child reads about characters in a book experiencing the same feelings, then the child will not feel so alone. Stories, whether told aloud or read from a book, can serve as a non-threatening buffer to stress. This strategy works for both older and younger children.

By taking time to read or tell stories together, you can help your child feel safe and close. After completing a story, find ways to open conversation. Allow the child to process the content, then share thoughts.

At first, children will talk about the character, not themselves. At some point, though, the emphasis generally shifts from the book to the shared experience.

Children often naturally make the leap from the story to their lives. If this does not happen, open-ended questions (How did Max feel? Why?) can be used to see if the child is ready to talk.

On a trip to the library, ask for assistance in selecting books to match the emotion, not just the event (loss, death, moving, survival, fear, anxiety).

Good examples for school-age children include *Island of the Blue Dolphin* (about coping) and *Little House on the Prairie* (about adversity, loss, staying together as a family).

Feelings can also be shared by looking at family photographs and family videotapes.

Play

Particularly for young children, play is the primary means of expressing feelings. Sometimes, parents can tell how children are feeling by watching their play or playing with them.

Take care not to impose your opinions on the child's feelings during play. Join in play only if asked. If your child feels you are directing instead of just playing, he or she will feel uncomfortable.

Some play items that help elicit feelings include sand, water, board games, poster paints, finger paints, chalk and chalkboard, playdough and puppets.

Talking

Sometimes in talking with children about sensitive issues, picking the right words is difficult for parents.

Here are some conversation starters to help you describe what is happening in the family:

- A separation is when parents decide to live apart from each other and figure out what to do about their marriage.
- A separation is a hard thing to talk about. It's not always easy telling people that your mom and dad are not living together anymore.
- We are not alone. We have other friends and family too.
- Sometimes kids feel caught in the middle during a separation.
- Usually kids want their parents to stay together. But sometimes things feel so bad that a child wishes his/her parents would separate.
- Sometimes things are better for a family when parents decide to separate.
- My leaving is not connected to loving you. It is because your mother/father and I do not get along. I love you as much as ever, and I always will.
- A divorce is when two people decide they no longer want to be married. They can't live together happily anymore. They decide to stop being husband and wife. They just have different ideas about things. We will always be parents to our children.
- One thing never changes. Your mom will always be your mother, and your dad will always be your father. You still have a family when your parents get divorced.
- Kids cannot cause a divorce. They also cannot keep a mom and dad together.
- Being parents and being a husband and wife are two different (and separate) jobs. Divorce, like marriage, is between adults only.
- When two adults decide to divorce, at least one of them has to go to a courtroom and talk to a judge. The judge helps figure out the rules for the divorce. A lawyer works with the parents and the judge to write up a paper about visiting, living with and caring for children. It says that the adults will no longer be married, but that they will always be parents.

How long should the adjustment take?

In this fast-paced world, we often get frustrated when we have to wait for things to happen. But going through a transition such as divorce takes time.

Studies show that divorce is indeed a source of stress for children, and it can result in a decline of well-being. On the other hand, some children will breeze through with few negative affects, while others will actually show improvement following divorce.

There are mixed and inconsistent results comparing children's adjustment by age, but most counselors indicate that children who cope best with divorce are those who continue to have a stable, loving relationship with both parents and regular, dependable visits from the non-residential parent.

Children's books on divorce

Books for preschool age children (under age 6)

Annie Stories: A Special Kind of Storytelling, Doris Brett. 1986. Publisher: Workman Publishing.

Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide to Changing Families, Laurene Krasney Brown and Marc Brown. 1986. Publisher: Little, Brown & Company.

Let's Talk About It: Divorce, Fred Rogers. 1994. Publisher: Putnam.

Talking About Divorce and Separation, Earl A. Grollman. 1975. Publisher: Beacon Press.

Books for elementary school age children (ages 6-12)

Annie Stories: A Special Kind of Storytelling, Doris Brett. 1986. Publisher: Workman Publishing.

Free to Be... A Family: A Book About All Kinds of Belongings, Marlo Thomas. 1996. Publisher: Bantam Books.

Talking About Divorce and Separation, Earl A. Grollman. 1975. Publisher: Beacon Press.

Why Are We Getting a Divorce?, Peter Mayle and Arthur Robins. 1988. Publisher: Crown.

Books for adolescents and teens

The Divorce Express, Paula Danziger. 1982. Publisher: Paperstar.

How it Feels When Parents Divorce, Jill Krementz. 1984. Publisher: Knopf.

It's Not the End of the World, Judy Blume. 1972. Publisher: Bradbury.

Places to look for help

General parenting information

ParentLink, 1-800-552-8522. Provides research-based information to assist parents.

<http://outreach.missouri.edu/cooper/fok/> provides linkages to lists of books, organizations and websites for parents. These resources are provided as a service and do not constitute endorsement. They are periodically reviewed and updated.

Single parents

Parents Without Partners (PWP international headquarters), 401 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611 (312-644-6610). Provides free referrals to local PWP chapters, which offer social and educational opportunities for single parents. Membership fees vary. <http://parentswithoutpartners.org>

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HEADLINE: Divorced from Reality

BYLINE: Kevin Heubusch

BODY:

Divorce can be a painful event, especially difficult and guilt-ridden for parents. New research by a University of Michigan psychologist suggests that some commonly held beliefs about the effects of divorce on children may not be true.

When divorce results in an end to conflict, a more stable home, and healthier parents, the risk for children may be greatly lessened, according to a study by Abigail Stewart and her co-authors. They conducted an 18-month-long study of 160 families in the Boston area who were undergoing divorce. Each family contained at least one child aged 6 to 12.

Conflict between parents may harm both children and parents, Stewart says. But it's particularly damaging for children under age 9, and for children who are drawn directly into the hostility. "There is a very direct relationship between children's psychological well-being and that of their parents," Stewart says. "When separation and divorce enhance parents' well-being in very straightforward and direct ways, it's reasonable to expect that children will benefit from the improvement."

The study also suggests that conflict between parents, regardless of their marital status, is painful for children. "We need to do a better job of helping families -- regardless of their form -- manage and contain conflict."

More on the study is published in the book *Separating Together: How Divorce Transforms Families*, published by Guilford Publications. Information is also available from the author at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan, 460 West Hall, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1092; e-mail abbystew@umich.edu.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: January 3, 1998

**Children's Adjustment to Divorce Largely in Hands of Parents
with One Exception: Dad's Departure Depresses Boys**

Divorce is a distressing experience, both for the couple in conflict and the children caught in the middle. But comprehensive, new research from Iowa State University presents strong evidence that parents, even those no longer living in the home, have a great deal of control over children's adjustment to the break-up of the family.

The research, reported in the November edition of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, is the first to examine all the major factors commonly associated with divorce and child development problem. While the findings provide encouraging information, they also reveal some critical gender differences in the ways divorce and parental reaction can affect adolescents. Divorced parents can substantially reduce the probability that their children will experience developmental difficulty by continuing effective parenting and avoiding hostile exchanges. However, boys remain at risk for depression even under the most optimal post-divorce conditions.

Even though divorce more than doubles the risk for emotional and behavioral problems in both boys and girls, the good news is that the vast majority of children from divorced families do just fine, says lead author Ronald L. Simons, who conducted the research with colleagues at Iowa State's Department of Sociology and Institute for Social and Behavioral Research.

"What is essential for kids is that they be parented well," says Simons. "If mom and dad continue to persevere in their parenting, are warm and supportive, monitor the kids and are consistent in discipline, the risk for conduct problems is no greater than in two-parent families. This is a more optimistic scenario than is often asserted."

The latest findings are part of Iowa State's Transitions Project, a longitudinal study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. For the past decade, this study has followed approximately 600 families, both married and divorced. This on-going study has produce a flow of data, generating greater understanding and raising new questions about how changes in family structure and processes impact the family unit and its various members.

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Children of Divorce -- 2

Regardless of family structure, girls are more likely to experience depression and boys to show conduct problems, according to Simons. However, the new research reveals a significant exception -- divorce increases a boy's chances of becoming depressed, regardless of other mediating conditions. "Even when those parents remain involved and supportive, boys often become depressed due to the departure of their father from the home," he says.

The research examined all the major explanations for the association between divorce and child developmental problems: loss of family income, parental conflict, psychological adjustment and parenting practices of the custodial parent (most typically the mother), and involvement of the non-custodial father. Previous studies have considered only one of two of these more popular theories.

Targeting adolescents with an average age of 14, the Iowa-based study involved 534 families -- 328 two-parent and 206 divorced mother-headed households. Researchers focused on two dimensions of child adjustment: whether they externalized problems, manifested by aggressive or delinquent behavior, or internalized their concerns, resulting in emotional distress and depression.

Findings largely support the argument that family structure influence child development through its impact on family processes. In other words, children of divorce are at risk for adjustment problems because their parents are less likely to engage in competent, consistent parenting and are more likely to engage in conflict exchanges than parents who are married to each other.

Divorce, with its emotional turmoil, time demands and often financial stress increases the custodial mother's own chances of becoming depressed, which in turn tends to disrupt the quality of her parenting, Simons explains. This, in turn, increases the child's risk for adjustment problems.

Data also show that being a non-residential parent is often a confusing role for fathers, who too often relinquish their parenting role and form a more buddy-type

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Children of Divorce – 3

relationship with the children. Compared to fathers in intact families, the divorced, non-residential dads were less likely to help their children solve problems, discuss standards of conduct or enforce discipline, increasing the probability that boys would display conduct problems.

"It is essential, especially for sons, that fathers continue to function as a parent," Simons emphasizes. "Simply showing the kids a good time and being a pal doesn't make any difference in terms of developmental outcomes for kids."

Quality of the custodial mother's parenting was the only factor that was related to both internalizing and externalizing problems of children. Findings indicate that quality of mother's parenting reduces much of the association between divorce and adjustment for both boys and girls. However, effects of the other factors differ by type of adjustment problem and gender of the child. For example:

- The quality of the custodial mother's parenting and the father's involvement in parenting are key indicators in boys' externalizing problems, while mother's parenting and post-divorce conflict increase girls' risk of adverse behavior.
- Pre-divorce conflict increases the chances of depression in boys while post-divorce conflict elevates a girl's risk for conduct problems. It may be that the threat of parental loss, rather than parental conflict per se is disturbing to boys and that deviant behavior is a way for a girl to express emotional anxiety produced by her parents' fighting. Or parental conflict could serve to model and legitimate a daughter's antisocial behavior.
- The quality of father's parenting has little effect on the association between divorce and girls' antisocial behavior. Mom's parenting is the most consequential factor.
- Conflict isn't as destructive for kids in two-parent families as long as it doesn't spill over into the quality of parenting. Except for girls in divorced families, conflict doesn't have much impact. Simons says researchers were surprised that parental conflict did not have more of an effect.
- Active engagement in the role of parent, not simply contact, by the non-custodial father substantially reduces the probability that boys will display conduct problems.

-more-

Children of Divorce – 4

• Parental divorce is more emotionally disturbing to boys than to girls. Boys in divorced families experience higher rates of depression than those in intact families, even when their mothers show positive psychological adjustment and practice competent parenting.

Past research has shown that divorce can contribute to adverse behavior such as lower achievement in school, early entry into sexual activity, delinquency and substance abuse, by both boys and girls. But the effects of divorce on children are widely stereotyped and not nearly as uniform as people generally believe, according to Robert Milardo, editor of the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* and professor of human development at the University of Maine. "Longitudinal studies of family relationships and dynamics, such as the work at Iowa State, are providing important new knowledge about how parents might ease the impact of a drastic change, such as divorce, on their children," he says.

Simons' Iowa State colleagues in the study, "Explaining the Higher Incidence of Adjustment Problems of Children of Divorce," and on-going research are: Rand D. Conger and Frederick O. Lorenz, professors of sociology; Leslie C. Gordon, post-doctorate fellow; and Kuei-Hsui Lin, graduate student in sociology.

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Margellen, I know you
were looking at this
issue - an intern did
this summary for
me, FYI.

—

November 4, 1999

To: Nicole Rabner

From: Lenore L. Espinosa

Re: Children of Embattled Divorce Symposium – Research findings

Theme of the symposium: Determines how best to protect children involved in high-conflict divorce from sustaining psychological abuse. Also, it examines the “best interest of the child” – and connects this with the special interests of families and professionals who attempt to care for these children.

The Qualifications of and Methods to be Used by Judges, Attorneys and Mental Health Professionals in High Conflict Child Custody Cases

Barry Bricklin, Ph.D.

Gail Elliot, Ph.D.

High conflict cases are increasing due to: the greater number of fathers seeking sole or joint custody; money recognized by more people as a potent force; internet etc. allow a parent to discover a large number of ways to attack the other parent. Should be familiar with the fact that the usual and standard clinical approaches (individual psychotherapy) in high conflict cases frequently achieve the exact opposite of what is intended: they make things not only worse but also unresolvable.

Suggest that high conflict cases demand even more specialized knowledge. A general solution is to say that more judges, attorneys and MHPs become more aware of the post-divorce research literature as well as the **exceedingly specialized** knowledge. They also suggest that standard health/mental procedures often prove ineffective with high conflict cases, and can even defeat the possibility to progress. Suggest that there is a need to reframe (for battling parents) what “protecting their children” means, and how to achieve these goals outside the legal area – address problems therapeutically, then monitor.

List of the areas in which two blue-ribbon committees suggested MHPs (mental health professionals) should have education and/or training and/or experience to be involved merely in child custody cases (not including high conflict variety):

- | | |
|---|---|
| ▪ Child development | ▪ Applicable state statutes and common laws |
| ▪ Child psychopathology | ▪ Typical custody and visitation arrangements |
| ▪ Adult psychopathology | ▪ Ethical standards in child custody evaluations |
| ▪ Effective parenting techniques and behaviors | ▪ Life-span developmental psychology |
| ▪ The effects of divorce and remarriage on families | ▪ Mental retardation and developmental disabilities |
| ▪ Applicable methods of psychological assessment | ▪ Behavior change |
| | ▪ Parent, family and school intervention |

Child Maltreatment and Endangerment in the Context of Divorce

Kathleen Coulborn Faller, Ph.D.

Professor, School of Social Work

University of Michigan

In order for child maltreatment and endangerment to be considered in decisions of custody and visitation, it must satisfy three conditions: 1.) there must be an identifiable parental behavior, 2.) there must be harm or potential harm to the child, and 3.) there must documentation of the parental behavior and potential or actual harm to the child.

Fundamental approach to interviews is the use of a team. Although use of a single evaluator is more efficient, a team decreases the danger of individual bias and enhances pursuit of a range of explanations for concerns about child maltreatment or endangerment. Using a team distributes work among several people, allowing for more exploration of information and sources. It can be advantageous for the team to have professionals from more than one discipline.

Evaluators should focus on parental behaviors of concern, when issues of maltreatment or endangerment have been raised. Evaluators need not be reluctant or defensive about inquiry related to these issues. An evaluation should involve a careful review of all past records, evaluations of all children in the family, evaluations of parents and interview with any new partners. Meetings can be used as an effective mechanism for sharing information, making decisions, and arriving at recommendations. The meeting usually would require three or four hours and should include evaluators, their consultants, and other relevant professionals (team).

Contentious Divorce: The Rocky Path to the Child's Best Interests

Michael S. Jellinek, M.D., Chief, Child Psychiatry Service, Massachusetts General Hospital; Professor of Psychiatry and of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School

Kate Erwin, M.D. Director, Court Evaluation Service, Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center; Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Alexa Bagnell, M.D., Second Year Resident in Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital; Clinical Fellow, Harvard Medical School

The study asserts an emphasis on the importance of structure in contentious divorces and how it can best be achieved using the "best interest" principle. Structure serves as a boundary for the behavior of people with personality disorders. A structure is consistent; reasonably frequent physical visitation assured telephone access and guaranteed sanctions for lateness or manipulation of the visitation schedule. For the child this structure is designed to optimize the elements each parent offers and to limit those tensions based on personality disorders. A court appointed Guardian-ad-Litem can potentially provide this structure with the following guideline: 1.) Expertise- family should be assigned a judge who is recognized for training and extensive experience in adjudicating contentious divorces. 2.) Consistency- continuing the custody team with some limitation on changes (especially the rotation of the judge off the case, strategic use of delays, or filing of motions to disrupt the team). 3.) Time- a frame that acknowledges the likelihood that the team may need to stay active for several years. 4.) Limit Setting- to contain character issues at every level. 5.) Cooperation and Respect- the judge, lawyers, and mental health clinician become a structure that reflects the pre-divorce, marital family and childhood families of each parent.

Building Multidisciplinary Professional Partnerships with the Court on Behalf of High-Conflict Divorcing Families and Their Children: Who Needs What Kind of Help?

Janet R. Johnston, Ph.D.

Notes how traditional professional roles and ethical constraints have contributed to rather than resolved family conflict and hurt children. There are a number of assumptions about the traditional role of family courts in conflicted custody matters that need to be questioned. For instance, family courts have primarily been used to make decisions for divorcing couples who cannot make their own. This assumes that the court has greater wisdom or some special knowledge about what is best for children.

Suggests a multi-disciplinary partnership approach. The new role of the family court can be one of leadership in bringing the issues, the parties and their helpers to the table to address four constructive questions that invite collaborative problem solving:

- 1.) How can this fractured family coordinate its resources and care for the children after the parents' separation?
- 2.) How can we protect, reconstitute and restore the positive parts of parent-child and family relationships wherever possible?
- 3.) How can these parents make ongoing cooperative decisions throughout their children's growing-up years?
- 4.) What help will these parents need from the community to raise their children?

Prevention Strategies to Protect Professional and Families Involved in High-Conflict Divorce

Thomas Schacht

**James Quillen College of Medicine
East Tennessee State University**

Reduce children's involvement in parental divorce proceedings: a secondary benefit of alternative dispute resolution is that it permits children to be excluded from involvement in divorce proceedings. The potential for children's statements, in divorce proceedings, to become fuel for a family conflict can be reduced if rules of procedure explicitly permit interviews to be conducted in chambers, without presence of parents' counsel or parents, but perhaps attended by a guardian ad litem and perhaps assisted by a court's mental health expert.

Therapeutic jurisprudence: Although families are functional psychological units, the legal system tends to see all issues as separate. A mechanism for consolidation of cases, particularly if this could be accomplished in a system of specialized multi-disciplinary courts, would allow one specially trained judge to see the progression of the family and to approach the problem with sensitivity to family issues.

From Fault Finding to Conflict Management to Differential Diagnosis and Treatment: Judicial Administration of High Conflict Divorce Cases Involving Children

Andrew Schepard

More recently, mediation has been joined by court-affiliated parent education programs as a judicial tool for facilitating a child's relationship with both parents after divorce. Court affiliated programs typically educate parents about the legal process of divorce and separation, the impact of divorce on the adults involved and, most important, the impact of divorce on their children and how parents can make the transitions easier for them by reducing their conflict. Forty-five states have enacted legislation or court rules authorizing courts to require parents to attend such programs. The mediation community is in the process of revising its standards of

practice for family and divorce mediation to recognize that mediators should be trained to recognize families in which violence exists and to shape the mediation process to insure safety for victims and children.

Unified Treatment: All legal issues arising out of a family's situation should be determined by a single judge, aided by a single social services team, both of whom have full information about the previous court proceedings. The same judge who decides who should have temporary custody of children, should also decide whether orders of protection are made permanent, interim support payments, and the schedule for the families' forensic evaluations. Managing the process of resolving high conflict divorce cases involving children requires that the court take charge of the family and put it on a rational track toward resolution.

Dispute resolution should assure safety of all involved, and must be responsible for keeping the dispute resolution process moving for high conflict families- the goal of expedition is to make things easier for all family members involved, especially children. The focus of the court is to create a rational, expeditious plan for resolution. Each court will have to create its own flow chart for high conflict cases that incorporate the resources available for such families in its local community. The critical point is that the court must have one. Please see attached.

Battered Child Syndrome: Is it a Paradigm for a Child of Embattled Divorce

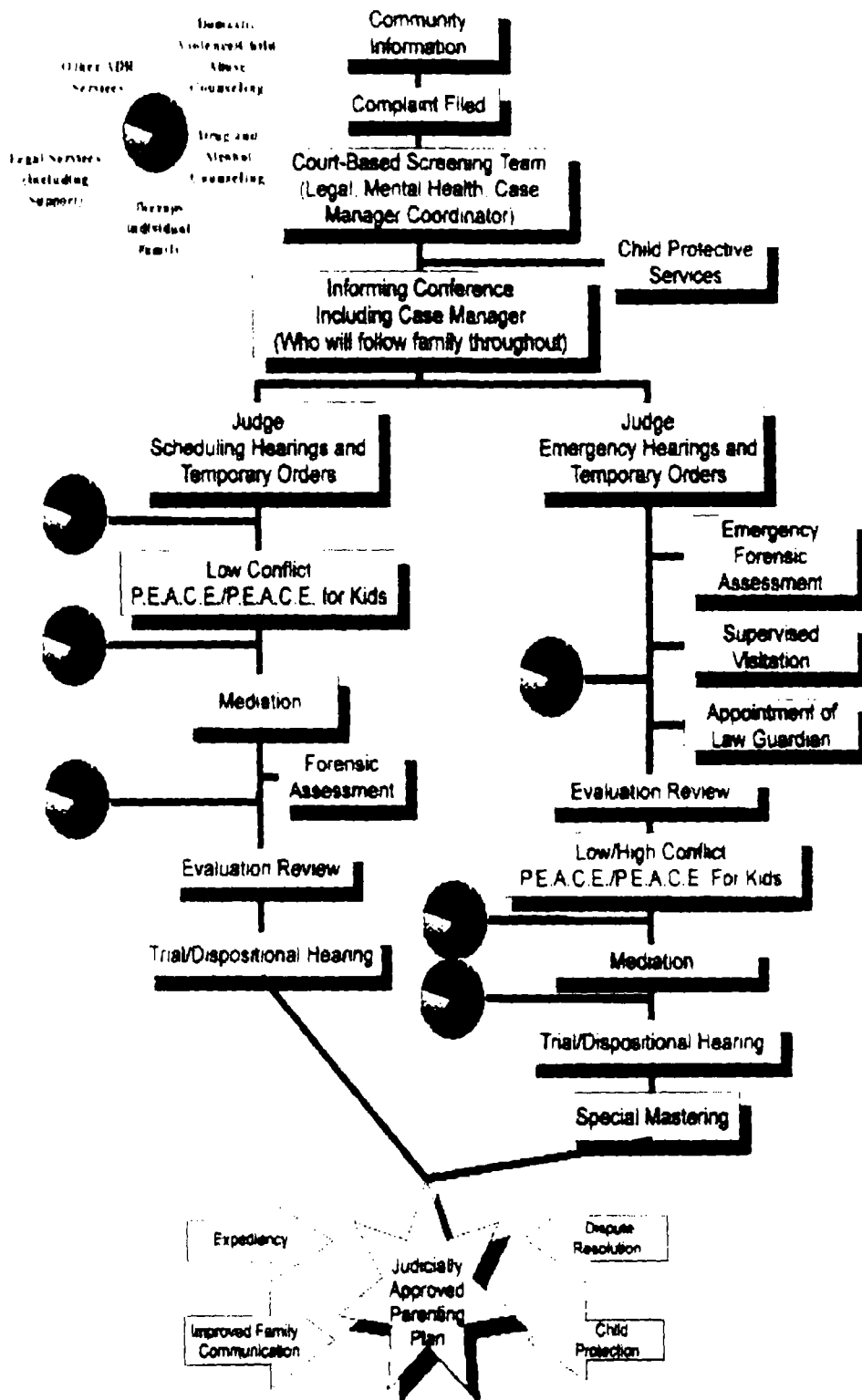
**Patrick Stern
Michael Mellon
Beth Butler
Suzanne Stroh
Nicholas Long
Jerry Jones**

Department of Pediatrics, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and Arkansas Children's Hospital

Estimated that 60% of all divorces will involve children, with more African-American children than white children (75% versus 38%) experiencing divorce prior to age 18.

High conflict divorce is related to greater risks of adverse emotional, cognitive, and physical affects for children than low conflict divorce. Conclude the battered-child syndrome offers a potentially beneficial paradigm for children of high conflict divorce cases.

The authors did not find a difference in the kind of symptoms the children in the ten reviewed cases had in high and low conflict divorce. No attempt was made to rate the magnitude of symptoms. Differences in symptoms may not exist because children presenting for evaluation and treatment in low conflict families had greater symptoms than children did in other low conflict families making them indistinguishable from children in high conflict families.



Flowchart for Judicial Management of High and Low Conflict Cases