



This is a column of questions and answers (Q&A) which address matters of coparenting relationships, divorce, child estrangement and alienation, and surviving the traumas resulting from family change. Dr. Mark Roseman brings more than 20 years of experience working with parents and reuniting children who suffer when parents separate.

The following Q&A is based on a dialogue of fundamental, well thought questions serving as the basis of Airi, a high school senior who is conducting their first research project on the topic of Divorce.

**1. What are some general situations/ problems of clients that you have faced (of both with children and with parents)? And what were the common problems?**

**A.** Thirty percent of parents separate with deep division; they dislike each other, some hate each other, others blame each other, and worse, one will brainwash their children against the other parent. That is called by many terms, most used is 'parental alienation.'

**2. What do you know about how the children feel when their parents are going through a divorce? Are there any common specific feelings that they feel?**

**A.** Children feel sad, they feel fearful of change. They resent having to rotate between parents for visitation schedules. They fear abandonment by one or both of their parents. They so dislike hearing one parent bad-mouth or talk against the other parent, blaming that other parent for the divorce.

**3/How can you tell if the child is going through depression or anxiety due to a divorce? What are some recommendations/advice to help children from being in that situation?**

**A.** Research shows that as far as six years before the parents separate, that children's anxiety, depression and even bullying indicate severe problems at home that will likely and eventually lead to parents separation and divorce.

<<Advice to Children related questions:>>

**4. What general advice do you give to children who are suffering from the separation of their parents?**

**A.** Try to be patient with your parents who show anger, fear and disappointment. Think of those things and situations which cause you yourself to feel these thoughts when you break up with a friend. It is often so very difficult to do so, but when we can try to place ourselves into someone else's 'shoes' so to speak, we can then become more sensitive and understanding of their feelings.

When we feel concerned about the many changes that we may observe, even consider, then it is so helpful for us to ask our parents the questions we are concerned about. Our parents who are able to will try very hard to answer these questions, and to try to assure us that all will be well as we all 'navigate' this very sad and uncomfortable experience. Though maybe painful for them, our parents will usually try to mask their pain, and to show you the love and protection you are so deserving of.

**5. What are some things the children can possibly try to do to relieve themselves from the suffering?**

**A.** Sometimes, children make bad choices to harm themselves. They may yell, they may talk disrespectfully to their parents, they may seek to be alone. Some may even want to cut themselves, or try alcohol, cigarettes or drugs. Some may bully other children, some may simply be careless about their bodies and offer themselves for adult pleasures in order to find love they feel may be missing now from their lives.

The best things to do to relieve themselves from pain and suffering is to pause, breathe, and try to relax. It is important to acknowledge what is happening to themselves, to their family, and that our parents made the decision to separate, to divorce. We have had nothing to do with their decision. Nothing. But it is equally important to then recognize that we can envision better things for us and our family.

We can and should imagine that our parents will eventually get along better, that we can enjoy and love each of our parents though they have decided they can no longer live together. We can choose to want to help our parents find more joy at a most distressing, even traumatic time when our family has seemed to break down, that we may need to move to another neighborhood or city.

But recognize, too, that often those changes happen because parents who have shared their income to maintain your home, to vacation, to provide you with all you have wanted, well, they no longer have that much money they can share. They now need to live on their own and find ways to make that happen comfortably, perhaps with your grandparents or friends. If you can recognize these factors, then you can also recognize what you prefer. It may be that you need help to better understand. So, tell your parents you want to speak with a counselor.

Tell your teacher at school and guidance counselor you need to talk about your feelings and that you want to have guidance in dealing with all these changes. You may have a friend experiencing the same thing as you, and it's good to speak with them. But do try to remember that their experience is not exactly the same as their parents are unique people, and have different reasons for separation and divorce.

Think of the questions you have, think of the feelings you prefer to have, think of how you may like to make your life more happy, more comfortable. Then, share these with a counselor who can be helpful in guiding you to achieve all you would like.

Remember, your life seems so overwhelming, so very sad, so difficult to understand. It is. True. But this is only for now. In time, all will change, and with more contentment, more order and predictability. Be patient with yourself, be patient with your parents. Learn to meditate when you should feel your heart bursting, and your mind clouded and unknowing. All will be much better for you.

<<Parent advice related questions:>>

**6. What general advice do you give to adults who are wanting to have a separation (between the couples and about the relationship with their children)?**

**A.** Parents need to focus on their children and their children's needs during times of very serious changes. But it will be very difficult for them to do so when they feel great losses. Parents suffer, too. They suffer the loss of their spouse, they feel loss of a helper

in the household, they feel the loss of household income. Parents may often feel shame, and may find that their friends will leave them because the friends cannot handle your parents separation and divorce.

So, I would have parents each find a support group to help them better understand what is happening in their life now. I would also ask your parents to see a counselor to get guidance and advice on how they can best share with you what they are thinking, what they are feeling, and what they wish now for themselves, and for you.

**7. What specific advice do you give to the parents to do to/ with their child when bringing up the discussion of divorce to prevent the children from feeling that hurt?**

**A.** Always be open to your children's questions, and share with them the answers in ways that they can understand given their age and capacity to do so. Learn how to speak with your children about this subject of divorce. Find a therapist (counselor) who can help your parents with their own fears, and with guidance for new paths to take to cope with their emotional losses, and family changes.

**8. Are there any things that have to be avoided during the process of divorce to make the process the least hurtful for both the partners and to their children?**

**A.** Be aware of the challenges in divorce. Parents should not talk badly about the other parent, they should not share their fears that are based more on feelings of rejection rather than truth.

**9. How much/ deep should the parents go when talking to their children about having a divorce?**

**A.** Focus on the child's questions, and only answer questions that they can best understand. Children do not need to know everything about the parent's relationships, about the divorce, about their feelings, about their fears. Parents should strive not to lie to their children. Instead, they need to shield their children from their personal perspectives, and to focus on how to best manage the house, household chores, prepare for visitation times. Even create new traditions, add or change tasks or responsibilities.

**10. What are effective ways or what can the parents do to make up for the loss to the children?**

**A.** There is no real easy answer to this. However, a parent who has lost access to their children (frequently called a targeted parent) should explore meditation, reading, and also the pursuit of those activities they have enjoyed but perhaps made little time to do so when married. For instance, listening to music, going back to college and grad school, learning a new profession, volunteering with a children's organization. I am also a great believer in therapy, so meeting regularly with a counselor will bring much satisfaction and even hope for eventual reunion with their children.

**11. What are some things parents should be clear about or say to their children during or after a divorce?**

**A.** Just be reassuring that there will be changes, but that they will still thrive. That any time the children may have need to talk, or would like to see a counselor, that they can.

Do you have answers to share for this post?

Do you have questions for future posts?

Reach out to Dr. Mark at [info@contemporaryfamily.org](mailto:info@contemporaryfamily.org). I look forward to hearing from you!

