



Mental Health Association of Tarrant County
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Back to School

Coping with Your Parents' Divorce

College can be a difficult time. Suddenly, you've moved away from everything and everyone that are familiar and begin to make your way in the world as an independent person. However, you still rely on your parents to be there when things get tough. But what do you do when your parents decide to divorce while you're in college?

*In our family portrait, we look pretty happy
Let's play pretend, let's act like it comes naturally
I don't wanna have to split the holidays
I don't want two addresses
I don't want a step-brother anyways
And I don't want my mom to have to change her last
name*

*In our family portrait, we look pretty happy
We look pretty normal, let's go back to that . . .
-- Pink, "Family Portrait"*

You are not alone. Thousands of college-aged students are affected by their parents' divorces each year. Here are some tips to help you cope if your parents divorce:

- **Keep things in perspective.** This is not about you. It is about them. Remind yourself that you did not cause your parents' marital problems or divorce, and that it is normal to have feelings of split loyalties to your parents. Your instincts will be to give as much aid and support as you can. However, it is very important that you take care of yourself and continue your own life during this period.
- **Don't go through this alone.** Sharing your feelings and concerns with others will help you get through this turbulent period. Talk to friends, family members and other people whose parents have also divorced. Contact your college counseling service or find a support group. Isolating yourself can raise your stress levels, mess up your concentration, and get in the way of your schoolwork, relationships and overall health.
- **Take care of yourself emotionally and physically.** Be good to yourself. Invest time in your hobbies and interests. Take time out to exercise, rest and relax. Keep to your normal routines. Try to avoid making major decisions or changes in life plans. Find safe ways to blow off steam. Do not use alcohol or drugs as a way to cope; they only lead to more problems.

- **It's OK to have a lot of different feelings.** People whose parents are divorcing often feel sad, angry and depressed, and have a tough time concentrating. You also may feel anxious about the future and feelings of responsibility for your parents' relationship. Reactions like these are normal and healing takes time. If you need to cry, yell or feel sad, let it out.
- **Don't let yourself get caught in the middle.** There may be pressure to choose sides, but try to be as loving as possible to both parents. Your parents need to work out their own divorce and financial arrangements without using you as a go-between. Stand up to your parents if their decisions make you angry or uncomfortable. If you think one of your parents may become violent, get out of the house and talk about the situation with a trusted friend or family member.
- **Think positive.** Easier said than done, right? Things may not be the same as they were before, but finding new, fun things to do and having reasonable expectations, will make this transition easier. Be flexible. Family traditions are still important but some of them may need to be adjusted. Help create new traditions and family activities. Spend positive times together in the new family groupings.

Life will get back to normal, although "normal" may be different from what you had originally hoped.

For more information, contact your local mental health association or the National Mental Health Association at 1-800-969-NMHA(6642) or www.nmha.org.

Other Resources:

The following are organizations and links that can provide support and additional information:

- Children of Separation and Divorce Center Inc. ó <http://www.divorceabc.com>
- American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy ó <http://www.aamft.org>
- Children's Rights Council - <http://www.gocrc.com/index.html>
- Divorce Magazine - <http://www.divorcemag.com/index.shtml>
- American Divorce Network - <http://www.americandivorce.net/>
- International Association for Marriage and Family Counselors ó <http://www.iamfc.org/>
- American College Counseling Association- <http://www.collegecounseling.org>
- American College Health Association- <http://www.acha.org>