

# Helping Children Cope with Separation and Divorce...

Other than the death of a parent, the breakup of a family can have the most devastating effect on children. Their lives change permanently as divorce is not a temporary state; it is an on-going process often involving parental conflicts, custody battles, and families fighting. The child witnesses and experiences everything.

## **Here are some of the issues separation and divorce can bring:**

- Children see parents as a single entity so a split is a difficult concept for them
- Children worry that their parents won't love them anymore
- Children deny that the situation is real
- Children feel guilty and blame themselves for the situation
- Children sometimes feel that if they are "really, really good" their lives will return to normal
- Children feel powerless
- Children require extra attention because they feel insecure
- Parents are preoccupied and children have less supervision and even less attention
- Children suffer abandonment issues; one parent left so the other might leave as well
- Children can be anxious and agitated on visitation day, or the day one parent replaces the other for custodial requirements
- Episodes of aggression and anger may emerge

## **Watch for the following warning signs:**

- Regression
- Low self-esteem
- Depression
- Acting out
- Sickness / injury (real or imagined)

## **How to help the child and family during this time:**

- Be sensitive to the situation (refrain from phrases like "broken home")
- Be available both physically and emotionally
- Encourage expression of feelings and emotions in a positive manner
- Assist children in accepting changes
- Discourage guilt
- Stress love and safety
- Talk with children about all the people in their lives that love them
- Provide consistency and predictability
- Display books on the subject
- Keep parents informed
- Support parents, but remain neutral

## **Tips for parents:**

- Encourage children to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Keep the children the focus and do not use them as messengers.
- Keep schedules and routines as consistent as possible in both homes.



*Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers*