

Kids of Divorce in Blended Families

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The ice berg

- Parents only see the tip of the ice berg
- Emotions of kids – under the ice berg
- What do you see under the ice berg

Kids of divorce

- Clingy, independent, fearful, anxious, regression
- Lethargic, sleep disturbances, behaviors out of control, concentration deficiencies

Research:

Judith Wallerstien, “What About the Kids” written after her 25 yr study of kids of divorce.

- Takes around 10 yrs for the child to process and grieve the divorce of their parents. It is a long grieving period for the death of their once intact family.

Downshift in young brains

- Physical threats
- Psychological threats
- Intellectual threats
- Emotional threats
- Cultural/social threats
- Resource restriction

Toxic Stress

- Below the surface
- Rapid breathing
- Fight or flight response
- Flood of hormones

Imagine the bear in the living room

[HTTPS://WWW.WRESTLINGGHOSTS.COM/THE-BEAR-IN-YOUR-LIVING-ROOM](https://www.wrestlingghosts.com/the-bear-in-your-living-room)

To understand why toxic stress causes so much harm while children are developing, we have to understand the body’s natural response to stress.

Imagine you're face-to-face with a grizzly bear. How would your body react?

- Your heart would begin to race and your breathing would become rapid.
- You're in what’s known as flight or fight, or stress response.
- Your body seizes up.
- A flood of hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released into your bloodstream, triggering glucose and fats to run for cover and store up in your body for just in case.

The trigger curve

But then the bear shrugs and walks away.

- The threat is gone. You enter the second half of the fear cycle: recovery and relaxation.
- You have are at peak and starting down the curve
- Your body returns to its normal state of homeostasis. You breathe a sigh of relief, knowing that you're safe.
- Takes twenty minutes from calm to recovery or for the adrenaline to resolve

A bear in both homes

Now, imagine that the bear lives with you in both of your homes. The threat never really leaves and it's never okay to relax. What happens to those stress hormones and physical responses in our bodies? They never go away; instead, we live in a constant state of hyperalertness, bodies constantly flooded with stress hormones that are now toxic to us.

Different ages experience divorce differently.

- Infants/preschool
- Young elementary 6-7-8 yr-olds
- Tweens
- Teens

My observations

In my therapeutic child care we were on the other side of the mirror. You might say could see into a home. If you have a home living center, blocks, sand play with family characters etc. kids will play out their stress. It's almost like you have a reversed Echo or Alexas in the home.

Example: Kid bristles in, sits in a chair in the home center, plants his feet on the table and says, "Woman, get me a beer!" Mom never drank that we know of. She was a strong Christian woman. We knew more about her child was experiencing than she did.

Example: Josh's face goes pale when his mom brings in his step brother. His new step brother had on his new shirt his dad had purchased for him for a special event.

The parent fell in love again – the child did not

But the child did not. The child will always only have two birth parents. Step parents shouldn't try to take the parent away from the child.

Watch out for the honeymoon period. The two very in love people get married and go on a honeymoon. They come home all lovey-dovey ready to set up this incredible blended family. I'm mean after all her kids think he's great. The kids seem to love him and they pull on his leg to go shoot hoops with them or play a game with them. Until they come home and reality sets in!

The honeymoon period ends when:

- The kids come home from the other parent and you are still there. The reality sets in that you are always going to be there from now on.

- Her sons begin to realize the dad is not going to be the DisneyWorld dad that buys them things and treats them with special treats.

In other words, life goes into a new normal. The kids of divorce are not ready for all of these changes. Remember unless your kids are older, it takes ten years for them to heal from the death of the once intact family. They may still be grieving that family.

While they want you their parent to be happy, now your happiness is

- encroaching on their territory
- interrupting their rituals with you
- taking up your time with YOUR parent
- Interrupting their family's schedule, they have had for years

From Kids and Divorce blog: <http://blog.dc4k.org>

Divorce impacts future generations within the family

- In some families divorce is cyclical.
- Children lose access to grandparents and extended family.
- Family traditions are lost.
- Generational family stories are not passed on to children.

Divorce affects personal relationships

- Relationships with each parent is affected because the parents are no longer one unit caring for and concerned about the child.
- Girls in single parent homes are more likely to get pregnant as teens.
- Kids may struggle with normal peer relationships.
- Divorce can negatively impact relationships with extended family members.

Divorce affects a child's schoolwork

- Many will have to repeat a grade.
- Some will drop out of school as teens because they are so far behind their peers in their learning ability.

Divorce affects their health

- Many will be ill simply because of the chaotic lives they are forced to lead.
- Some become ill because high levels of stress compromise their immune system.

All of these situations affect children of divorce in blended and step families.

“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” (Deuteronomy 31:8)