



USEP-OHIO PARENT TIP: Divorce in the Family

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My friend Peggy called recently to ask for help. Her brother Craig and sister-in-law Barbara are divorcing, and Peg is worried about the children, Sarah and Brian. She thinks that both parents are so angry that they are unable to help the children understand what is happening in order to cope with the coming changes in their lives. Most families experience divorce, and have a huge responsibility to help keep the children feeling safe and secure about the future and their relationships with both parents.

Sarah is angry and afraid. She is having bad dreams, losing her focus in school and seems depressed. Brian began to be combative with his friends, and even yelled at his baseball coach. When Barbara, their mother, explained that there were some changes at home, it helped the teachers and coaches understand that Sarah and Brian are under duress, and need extra patience and reassurance.

Craig, Brian and Sarah's father, has moved out to a new apartment. He is coping with his own grief, frustration, and fear by acting as if everything is A-OK and that weekend visits to go to the zoo and the movies together will satisfactorily replace daily life together with the family.

What are some of the things we adults can do to help the children understand and heal?

Parents can help kids to adjust by not expecting children to accept and understand. Give them TIME. It is very likely that the divorce is the

result of months or years of a process leading up to the decision. Tell yourself and assure the children that it is normal to feel angry, depressed and frustrated about the divorce and the changes it forces upon their lives.

Admit that divorce changes life as it has been, and replaces it with something unknown. Kids are afraid of the unfamiliar, unpredictable life ahead.

Everyone must all be given the time and a right to grieve about the separation and divorce.

Parents, grandparents, and teachers can help. Encourage the children to talk about their feelings. Reassure them. They are loved as much as ever by both of their parents and the family.

Be supportive of the parent decision, even if you disagree. Say, "It is hard to understand. But your mom and dad both love you and that will never change."

Parents should tell the children as soon as possible, so they don't hear the news from others.

Explain that everyone is hurt, and that it's natural to feel angry and upset, but you will always be open to talking about it. Help them to understand your unique situation. Your family may not be like the family of a friend they have heard angry or scary stories about. "We worked carefully to make this decision and know it will be hard for you. We will work just as hard to help work out a new way of living for all of us. We are still a family, just living in a new way."

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