

A tween guide to divorce

**ROSEN
LAW FIRM**

Divorce is Different Here



About this book



INTRODUCTION

Until now, you've probably only heard about divorce from what you've seen in movies or from your friends. But now, it's happening to you.

You've got to be confused and angry. You want to know why. You think that maybe if you just cleaned your room more and always did your homework, your parents would stop fighting. Maybe you can do something to fix their relationship. You wish life would just go back to the way it was. But it can't.

The first thing to know is that you don't have to go through this alone. Some studies say that as many as one million kids a year watch their parents get divorced. That's a lot of kids who know exactly what you're going through.

That might seem like a sad statistic. But believe it or not, there are some good things about divorce. Right now, you might not know how you'll ever get through it. But you will, and hopefully, this guide will help you.

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WHAT IS DIVORCE?



Some kids worry all the time that if parents fight, it means they're going to split up. In many cases, that's not true, and parents can work out their differences. But sometimes, the fighting is a sign of deeper problems in a relationship.

Some couples who can't work out their problems will separate for awhile. One parent moves out, but they stay married. When parents get divorced, it means they have agreed to end their marriage for good.

Marriage is like a contract. When your parents got married, they probably agreed to a few things: They would live together, share a home, share money, share children, and share all of the big decisions in their lives.

When parents get divorced, they agree to end their marriage contract and find new ways to make all of those big decisions now that they won't be living together.

Usually, each of your parents will hire a lawyer to help them divide all of the things they have shared, like their home and bank accounts.

One of the most important parts of a divorce agreement is custody and visitation. This means deciding who you get to live with and how often you get to see the parent who doesn't live with you.

Most parents can work this out between themselves. But sometimes, that doesn't happen. In that case, it could mean going to court where a judge will decide whether you get to live with your Mom or Dad and how often you can see the other parent. Depending on how old you are, the judge may ask you what you want and may take your wishes into consideration. Mostly, though, a judge has to decide what is best for you – even if it's not exactly what you want.

For kids, the most important part of the divorce is the separation. Whether your parents have to see lawyers and go to court probably isn't as important to you. What matters is that they're splitting up, and your family is changing forever. It can be scary because you don't know what it will be like to have your parents living apart.

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WHO IS TO BLAME?



When something bad happens, it's natural to want to know whose fault it is. Maybe your Mom met someone else and is leaving your Dad. So it must be her fault, right? Or perhaps your Mom always tells you how your Dad doesn't care about her anymore. Must be Dad's fault then.

It can be really hard not to take sides. But the truth is that you will never know the whole story about why your parents are splitting up. It's okay to ask questions about why your parents are getting divorced, but try not to pick one parent's side over the other. Both your parents need your love right now, and you need both of them, too.

Many kids blame themselves. They think that if they had behaved better or gotten better grades, their parents wouldn't have gotten mad and would have stayed together.

But think about it: Lots of kids misbehave and struggle at school. Their parents get mad at them sometimes, but that doesn't make their parents get a divorce.

So, one of the most important things to understand is that divorce is NEVER the child's fault. Divorce is about parents; it's not about kids. Sure, it affects your life, but there is nothing you could have done to drive your parents apart.

Happy couples sometimes fight over their kids, but they learn to work out their problems and come to an agreement. Unhappy couples fight about a lot of things, but they never seem to find a solution. They just keep going around and around on the same issues, or they stop talking about them altogether. It's the fact that your parents don't get along that is ending their marriage.

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ONCE UPON A TIME...



There was a girl named Cindy who lived in a beautiful house in a beautiful city where the sun always shined and the flowers always bloomed. One day, Cindy's parents said they were getting a divorce. But Cindy wanted them to get back together. So, she cleaned her room and did all her homework in order to be the perfect child.

One day, she called both her parents from school, pretending to be really sick. They both rushed to school to check on Cindy. When they got there, they looked into each other's eyes and realized that they really loved each other and wanted to get back together. They lived happily ever after (and Cindy didn't even get grounded for pretending to be sick at school.)

Great story, but sounds like a fairy tale, doesn't it?

Lots of kids whose parents are divorcing fantasize about getting their parents back together. They daydream about what it would be like if their family wasn't splitting up. They come up with grand schemes to convince their parents that the divorce is just one big misunderstanding.

It's okay to indulge in a little bit of fantasy. You need some time to deal with all of the changes, and pretending that nothing has happened can give you a nice break from reality. But eventually, you'll have to admit that your parents are not going to be together and that life will be very different from what it was before. That doesn't mean that your life will be bad, but it does mean that it will be different.

If you're constantly fantasizing about your ideal family life, it probably means you're not dealing with all of the real problems that you're facing because of the divorce.

How can you help this? Instead of making up the future in your dreams, ask your parents to tell you what will happen now that they're getting a divorce. They may not have all the answers, but they can give you some thoughts and hopefully reassure you that the future is still going to be bright.

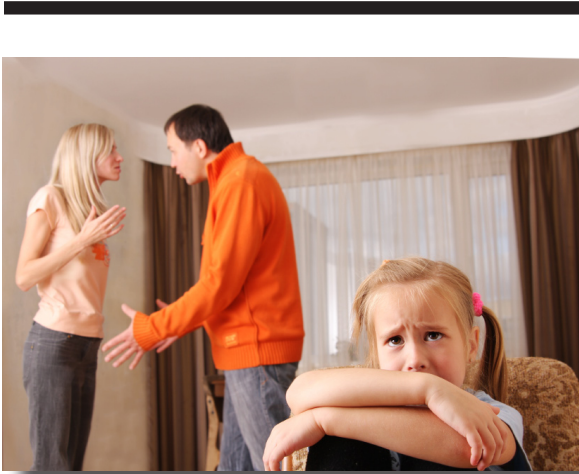
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Deep down in your heart, do you really think they'll get back together? Isn't it better to focus on all of the good changes that you can see now that they're apart? Are they happier people? Is this a chance for a new beginning for your whole family? Remember that lots of kids and grown-ups have come from homes with divorced parents and have come through it just fine. It might have been painful for them, but they have gone on to live great lives.

HOW TO DEAL WITH YOUR FEELINGS



"My parents have only been divorced for a year, and I'm just getting used to it. They're getting divorced because my Mom was dating another man. She didn't tell me about her dates, but I sneaked a look at her calendar, and that's how I found out she's going out with other men.

I hate her for that, and I haven't seen her in three months. In October, I get to choose the parent I get to live with, so I'm obviously choosing my Dad.... I am feeling totally weird talking about her "secret" dates to my Dad. Why won't she just tell me about seeing other men? Is she scared I will hate her for the rest of my life? Why can't she just be honest about her relationships with me?"

When someone asks you how you're feeling about the divorce, do you know how to answer? Chances are you're feeling okay with the divorce one minute. But the next minute, you're a mess. You hate your Mom and Dad for doing this to you. Today, you may vow to never forgive your Mom – ever. Tomorrow, you love her and feel angry at your Dad. It's normal to be a big jumble of emotions.

Being sad and angry can affect your whole mind and body. It can even make your head hurt. It makes you want to punch something or destroy something. It might even make you want to hurt yourself or other people, which is never good.

Anger can seem hard to deal with, but you can get it out in good ways and feel much better afterward. Here are some things you can do to get your anger out of your system:

- Punch a pillow as hard as you can, or scream into a pillow.
- Take a baseball bat, and hit the trunk of a large tree.
- Go outside and yell at the top of your lungs.

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- Take an old phone book or some old newspapers, and just rip them to shreds.
- Exercise: Shoot some hoops on the basketball court, ride your bike around the block a few times, or kick a soccer ball.
- Even if you think you're too old for toys, use some dolls to play out the things that are making you upset.
- Cry – it isn't for wussies! It can feel great to get it out, and it's very healthy to cry. If you don't want anyone to know about it, go to a private spot like your room, the bathroom, or an empty park.
- Spend some time with your favorite pet.
- Write out your feelings in a secret diary, or write a short story or poem about what you feel.
- Dance around your room, or sing to your favorite song.
- Read your favorite novel or comic book, or put on your favorite movie

Whatever activity you choose, it's important to find a healthy outlet for your anger and frustration. Getting out all of that extra energy will help to calm you down.

HOW TO TALK TO MOM AND DAD



"I'm not big into talking to anyone – well, not adults. Today my kinda-almost-sorta step-Mom and I got to talking about everything. We talked a lot about my feelings and her feelings and her kid's feelings and like, I'm happy about it, but I don't want it at the same time, which is a normal feeling. She understands, but it just makes me feel uncomfortable. I'm not sure whether it's because she's my step-Mom or because she's an adult."

When you have questions and concerns about a divorce, your parents are the first people you should turn to for answers – even if talking to them is the last thing you want to do.

You might feel like your parents are so distracted by dealing with each other that they're not paying attention to your needs. It helps if you tell them how it makes you feel. Lots of times, parents don't realize that what they do and say can hurt their children. It comes as a real surprise when you tell them.

Even if your parents do ask you how you're doing, you probably sometimes answer: "I don't know." They might get mad at you for not taking them seriously, but sometimes, you really don't know how you're feeling.

Here are some questions you can ask if you're having trouble finding ways to start a conversation with your parents:

- Why are you getting a divorce?
- Can the whole family ever get together again, or will I only ever see you separately?
- Where will we live, and who will I live with?
- What will happen to the house and our pets?
- Will I have to change schools and leave my friends?

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- Is one of you going to live somewhere else?
- When will I get to see each of you and how often?
- How will visitation work?
- Do I have to go to court or talk to a social worker?
- Can you both come to my band concerts or sports games or graduation?

If your parents can be in the same room with each other, suggest that you have a family meeting to ask them some of these questions. Or ask your parents to sit down with you one-on-one if they can't be around each other.

Too Much Talk

You might feel like you're spending TOO much time talking about the divorce. If that's the case, it's okay to take a break and talk about something else. Your relationship with your Mom and Dad doesn't always have to be about the fact that they're splitting up. There's other stuff in your life, too, like school and friends and the TV shows you like.

It's all right to say: "I don't want to talk about it right now. Can we talk about something else?" But come up with some suggestions of stuff you'd rather talk about.

However, if your parents keep asking you how you're feeling, it could be that they don't think you're dealing very well with the divorce. So, ask yourself: Are you fine, or do you need some help? Is there anything your parents could tell you that would make you feel better? Would it help to talk to a professional counselor?

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

Parents aren't perfect, but they're also not the devil. They're human, and they make mistakes. They also love you very much even if getting divorced means that they spend more time focusing on each other than on you.

Unfortunately, when parents are in the midst of a divorce, it's common for them to put their kids in the middle by asking them to spill private details about the other parent or pass messages to them.

Parents do this because they don't know how to communicate with each other and are filled with anger, pain, and jealousy. But they're adults, and they have to learn to work through it. They're old enough not to act like little kids.

So, if you're caught in the middle, you're allowed to put your foot down. It's okay to flatly refuse to be the messenger or the spy. You might have to remind your parents of this again and again. If your parents really can't seem to put your interests ahead of theirs, suggest that they go to counselling to work it out. If that doesn't work, find another adult you trust that you can talk to about your concerns.

If you really don't think you can talk to your parents about how they're handling the divorce, consider giving them a Children's Bill of Rights. A bunch of child psychologists and divorce experts came up with this. It's a list of important points that parents need to consider in order to protect their kids during a divorce.

A few of them have even posted different versions online. If you don't think your parents are respecting your rights, print out two copies, and ask each parent to sign one. When your parents do something that makes you unhappy, show them the bill of rights that they signed to remind them.

You can check out a few samples of the Children's Bill of Rights here: <http://blog.thesmartdivorce.com/category/childrens-bill-of-rights/>

HAVING TWO HOMES

"My parents have been divorced for a few years, and I go back and forth during summer. I kind of like it at my Mom's house a little better, but I love both parents a lot! I did not like changing schedules at first, but I got used to it after awhile, and now, it is no biggie. During the summer, it's really annoying to have to switch houses, especially going from my Dad's to my Mom's. My Dad has to be at work at 7:30, so he wakes me and my sister up at 7:00 so he has time to drop us off at my Mom's and then get to work. Summer is meant to sleep in!"



One of the biggest unknowns for kids when their parents get divorced is where they're going to live and what will happen if they have to split their time between two homes. It's especially weird if one of their parents moves far away or moves in with a new partner.

Right now, you've got your school, your close friends, and your daily activities. It can seem scary to think about having to leave those things – even if you're just leaving for a few weeks in the summer or every other weekend.

Splitting your time between two homes can seem like a pain. You constantly have to plan your time with your friends around your visitation schedule. You feel like you're always packing and unpacking your bags, and you probably forget the things you need half the time. Maybe your Dad has moved to a new place, and it feels totally weird to hang out with him in a place that isn't your family home.

But there are ways to make it easier!

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MAKE BOTH HOMES YOUR OWN

No matter where your parents end up living, find a way to put your mark on both homes. If you get your own room at your Mom or Dad's place, ask if you're allowed to choose a new paint color. Hang posters and artwork. Help pick out furniture. Bring some books and keepsakes and music.

If you aren't able to get your own room and make some changes, ask for a piece of furniture to store some of your things. Or find a space that's just for you. Build a fort. Check out a basement cubbyhole or a secluded spot under the stairs. Stash some of your favorite things there. This way, you can make your parent's new place your own when you need a bit of alone time.

If one of your parents moves to a different city, make it your mission to check out the new neighborhood. See if there are any youth groups or community centers where you can make some new friends. Check out the parks and nearby shops or malls for things to do.

Try to find a new activity. Maybe you've always wanted to take horseback riding lessons, and there's a stable in the neighborhood. Take the opportunity to discover something new and exciting that you didn't even know existed.

This can also be a good way to spend a bit of time with your parent. Ask him or her to take a drive with you so that you can check out the new community, or offer to help your parent run some errands.

Even if your parents didn't move that far away from each other, it can be awkward to have to "visit" one of them in a new home. This is a good time to suggest new ways to spend time with Mom or Dad.

For instance, find a TV show that both you and your Dad like to watch, and make a point to watch it together every week. Maybe suggest taking a cooking class with your Mom. You could even have a before-bed ritual: Maybe you guys always drink warm milk together at the kitchen table.

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Finding some common activities you can do with each of your parents will help make your new family situation feel more “normal.”

GET ORGANIZED

It can be really confusing to constantly have to pack and unpack all of your belongings when you’re moving in between two homes.

Instead, see if you can have two sets of really important items that you can keep at both of your parents’ homes. This way, you’ll never lose them. You might want to leave things like a toothbrush, pajamas, books, or stuffed animals at both parents’ houses. Maybe you can even have two sets of clothes and divide your toys between the two homes. If that’s not possible, keep a list of everything you’ll need when you’re going to see your other parent. Leave that list in the bag that you always take, and check each thing off while you’re packing. That way, you’ll never forget anything that you really need.

“I WANT TO LIVE WITH DAD”

If you really aren’t happy with the custody arrangements that your parents have set up, you may decide you want to live with your other parent. But think carefully about why you want to change homes. Are you just trying to get back at one of your parents? Or are there good reasons? Are there things you can change about Mom’s house to make it more like Dad’s? See if you can get a bit more time at Dad’s house instead of moving to his place entirely.

If you’re set on moving, though, come up with good reasons why it’s better for you to live with the other parent. Don’t just say: “I like it better at Dad’s house” or “Mom’s house is more fun.”

Maybe Dad's house is closer to school and your friends. Maybe at his house, you get your own room, but at Mom's house, you have to share. Maybe it's quieter, and you can get your homework done easier. Or maybe it's closer to parks where you can play.

Give your parents good reasons why it's better to live with one than the other. They may still feel a bit hurt that you're making a choice, but they'll understand why you decided like you did.

YOUR PARENTS AND DATING



At some point, your parents will both probably start dating other people again. Maybe one of your parents already has a new partner.

It can feel really weird to think of your Mom or Dad going out on a date. It can be even weirder when your parents introduce you to their new partners. But be happy that your parents are dating. I know that seems like a weird thing to be happy about, but it means they're moving on and hopefully finding someone who will be right for them.

Your gut reaction is probably to be suspicious of your parent's new boyfriend or girlfriend. It will take time to get used to this new person. But don't dismiss them right away. Try to find a few things that you like about the person your parent is dating. Maybe your Mom's new boyfriend makes really good spaghetti, or your Dad's new girlfriend tells good jokes.

List some things you don't like about them. Then, list some ways that you can overcome these things. You can even write down some things you can do with your parent's boyfriend or girlfriend – just the two of you – like shopping or going to a movie. You might be surprised to find out that he or she is cooler than you think. Cut them some slack, too. They're probably nervous and really want you to like them.

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OUTSIDE HELP



Some kids really struggle with their parents' divorce. And some parents are struggling, too, and can't always help their kids with everything they need.

Many kids benefit from talking to a professional counselor or therapist. They're pretty good at getting you to open up and deal with your feelings – that's what they're trained to do.

If you think you could benefit from counselling, ask your parents if they can let you see a therapist. Sometimes, this is covered under your parents' insurance at work.

Your school also probably has some guidance counselors who are trained to help kids deal with a wide variety of problems. Therapists and guidance counselors are also very good about keeping your talks with them private (unless they have to report a crime, such as physical abuse or neglect.)

Even if you don't want to see a counselor, it could help you to talk to another adult who isn't one of your parents. Most kids can benefit from finding a mentor.

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A mentor can be any adult that you trust who doesn't take sides with either your Mom or your Dad. They can be:

- Your grandmother
- Your favorite uncle
- An older cousin
- Your baseball coach
- A teacher
- A close family friend
- A pastor or other religious leader
- A babysitter
- The parents of your best friend

Don't forget that your friends can be a great source of support if you need to talk about the divorce. You probably have some friends whose parents have split up. Even if you don't, your friends are there to help you and support you.

Remember that finding someone to talk to isn't about being needy. It's about connecting with people who understand you and want to spend time with you. Everybody needs to talk to someone sometimes.

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EVERYTHING'S CHANGING – BUT SOME THINGS STAY THE SAME



With divorce, there are lots of changes. But some things don't change. You still have a Mom and a Dad. You still have a school. You still have friends. You still have a home – probably two homes now. You're still a family, even if it's a different family from what you've known up to now. But change doesn't mean that your family has to be unhappy.

You might want to keep a list of all of the good things in your life that will stay the same and look at it whenever you need a bit of cheering up.

Lots of kids your age are superstitious. They think that if a black cat crosses their path, it's bad luck. And they worry that if their parents get divorced, it means they'll be unlucky in love, too. But it's not true. Lots of couples get divorced, but lots of couples stay together forever. And lots of kids of divorced parents go on to have happy marriages. Being happy is all about the choices that you make in your life, and you can get started right now.

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RESOURCES

Books:

Beacon Street Girls: Letters from the Heart by Annie Bryant (Aimed at girls)

A school project on family history is giving the Beacon Street Girls a lot to think about. But family is an uncomfortable subject for Maeve. Her parents have just separated, and she doesn't want to talk about it to anyone, not even her best friends in the world. Can a bundle of old letters make Maeve see her family in a new light and give her something to share with the Beacon Street Girls?

Sarah Simpson's Rules for Living by Rebecca Rupp (Aimed at girls)

Sarah Simpson has tons of lists: lists of the things she doesn't like about her father's new wife and her mother's new boyfriend, lists about why you should only drink skim milk, and more. But with new friendships and new experiences, Sarah begins to realize that change might not be such a horrible thing – and that families come in all shapes and sizes.

The Spiderwick Chronicles by Holly Black and Tony DiTerlizzi (A movie and books good for both boys and girls)

After their parents' bitter divorce, twins Jared and Simon Grace and their older sister, Mallory, move with their Mom to a creaky, smelly old house in the country. Each child deals differently with the divorce, although Jared lashes out at his Mom and wishes he could go live with his Dad. But their family problems suddenly don't seem so bad when the children discover a mysterious book that opens their eyes to a hidden realm of fantastical – and sometimes terrifying – creatures.

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BROADWAY SHOW:

13 The Musical (Good for both boys and girls) – Guess what, Tweens? You’re so popular that someone even wrote a Broadway musical about you. It’s also about divorce. When 13-year-old Evan Goldman’s parents split, he is forced to leave New York City for small-town Indiana and make all new friends – just in time for his Bar Mitzvah. You can check out some music from the show at <http://www.13themusical.com/> and <http://13fans.com>.

WEBSITE:

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/> (Good for both boys and girls)

PBS, the TV channel that sometimes brings you boring, educational television documentaries, has a pretty cool website for kids aged 9-12 called “It’s My Life.” The site is about everything Tweens go through. There are games, e-cards, articles, and message boards. There are even lots of resources about divorce, including a video where Tweens talk about what it was like when their parents split up. The link to the divorce section is here: <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/parents/resources/divorce.html>

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Rosen Law Firm helps divorcing families successfully navigate one of life's most difficult chapters. All too often, the divorce process becomes confrontational, chaotic, and vindictive. Rosen Law Firm offers a structured approach that leads to certainty and finality. With our guidance, clients find the divorce process to be a time of reflection and goal-setting which allows them to learn and grow. Clients emerge from their inevitable sense of loss feeling confident they will find a fresh start while transitioning into a new phase of their lives.

Rosen Law Firm focuses on serving our clients' needs in a number of ways. Our multidisciplinary team combines its unique skills to provide a level of service that is almost impossible for any single professional to achieve. Our team is trained in and uses a variety of approaches for ending a marriage, including collaborative divorce, mediation, lawyer-led negotiation, and litigation in court when appropriate. This range of options allows our clients to choose the path to resolution that works best for their family's specific situation. The experience of divorce is frequently painful, discouraging, and filled with hostility. These feelings can be destructive to ongoing relationships between parents and their children. Recognizing this, we inspire our clients through our belief that divorce doesn't need to be a terrible experience. We provide hope as we work toward resolutions that maintain ties and dignity.

For its success in satisfying clients, even in the midst of divorce, Rosen Law Firm was awarded Metro Magazine's BEST DIVORCE LAW FIRM. Our focus on client service has also helped our firm grow into the largest of its kind in the state. Rosen Law Firm clients are regularly surveyed to ensure that our high standards of service are maintained and to determine what else we might do to improve. We are extremely proud of the trust placed in us by our clients, who regularly say they would refer us to a friend or family member.

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4101 Lake Boone Trail, Suite 500
Raleigh, North Carolina 27607
Phone: (919) 787-6668

301 McCullough Drive, Suite 510
Charlotte, North Carolina 28262
(704) 307-4600

5826 Fayetteville Road, Suite 205
Durham, North Carolina 27713
Phone: (919) 321-0780

