

Will You Dance at Your Child's Wedding?

More than one-third of marriages end in painful divorce. But the choices you make during your divorce will influence your child's health and well-being over a lifetime.

The stakes are high. Kids from divorced families often experience higher rates of teen pregnancy, more difficulties in school, and challenges in their own marriages. Two of the biggest predictors? The amount of conflict between you and your spouse and the amount of support from friends and family.

Find a way to become an effective co-parenting partner with your ex-spouse. Together, you can help your child grow up resilient and make mature, responsible choices in the decades to come.

Remember, even if you aren't married anymore, your child will always be a part of both of you. Your child loves you both and counts on the two of you to put his or her needs first.

Most health insurance policies cover the service of MFTs so long as the services are "medically necessary." This typically includes coverage for face-to-face sessions for a diagnosable mental health problem. Such coverage may be limited. Please contact your health insurance company for detailed information about the coverage available to you and your family.



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WHAT KIDS DON'T SAY IN WORDS:

Helping Children Navigate Divorce



Brought to you by the
California Association of
Marriage and Family Therapists



WHAT KIDS THINK ABOUT DIVORCE

Divorce is confusing and stressful for children. Kids often feel responsible, and most would prefer their parents stay together in spite of the problems! Older kids are often troubled by their conflicted loyalties to both parents.

Signs and Symptoms Your Child Needs You

When your child's behavior changes from what is typical, pay close attention. If you notice short-term problem behaviors, use the tips under "What You Can Do Right Now" to help. If these behaviors persist or worsen, contact a Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) for extra support.

AGES
1-4

Toddlers may regress. Reverting to thumb sucking or bed-wetting is common. A child may act more immaturely and need an old security blanket or toy for comfort.

AGES
4-6

Preschoolers may withdraw socially. They may play more alone than with friends and seek the nearness of an adult. They may show more anxiety in play with friends or resist direction from adults.

AGES
6-13

School-age children grieve. Younger children may yearn for the other parent, while older kids may be angry and are more easily drawn into "taking sides." (When parents allow this, their kids face more serious problems later.)

AGES
13+

Adolescents act out. Every child does it differently. Girls sometimes internalize sadness, only to experiment later with drugs or become involved in early sexual activities. Other behaviors—like aggression, bad language or failing grades at school—may be more overt in boys.

Consult a therapist who specializes in helping kids during divorce if you sense your child is anxious, depressed, or is experiencing feelings of low self-esteem.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- ❑ Inform kids about the divorce as a family (when possible). Since their reactions will depend on what messages they hear—and sense—from you, stay calm. Plan ahead what you will tell them, but don't overwhelm them with information.
- ❑ Ask about—and listen to your child's fears and concerns. Tell them who will tuck them in at night, fix breakfast, help with homework, and when they will see the other parent. Don't give false hope about reconciliation, but reassure them they are not responsible for the divorce.
- ❑ Respect and support your child's relationship with the other parent. Children often feel they are betraying the parent they don't live with. Show by your actions and deeds that you won't put them in the middle. Never say unkind things about the other parent to your child.
- ❑ Expect and accept your child's anger and sadness. Grief is normal for kids to experience when parents divorce, so provide ongoing extra reassurance while they adjust. Maintaining familiar rituals and family routines (e.g., Sunday dinner, watching a favorite TV show together) help.
- ❑ Go slow when introducing your child to someone new if you choose to date. Keep the relationship platonic in front of the child.

OFFERING EXTRA SUPPORT About Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are relationship experts. They work with individuals, couples, families, children, adolescents, and the elderly, providing support and perspective as patients struggle with life's challenges.

Licensed by the State of California, MFTs are psychotherapists who are uniquely trained and credentialed to assess, diagnose, and treat a wide range of issues so individuals achieve more adequate, satisfying and productive relationships and social adjustment.

The California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) is an independent statewide non-profit organization made up of over 28,000 practicing Marriage and Family Therapists. CAMFT is dedicated to advancing marriage and family therapy as a healing art, science, and mental health profession. In fact, CAMFT sponsors TherapistFinder.com so Californians can gain access to qualified local experts who can help.



Seeking a Marriage and Family Therapist or other mental health professional to assist with life's difficulties is a sign of courage and a step in the right direction. Always ask about a therapist's special areas of expertise (e.g. grief counseling, children's issues, relationship counseling) before you engage them to ensure it's the right fit for you.

TherapistFinder is a California-wide interactive, online directory that is user-friendly and searchable by name, location, and area of expertise. It's your introduction to one or more qualified psychotherapists who hold a California license.

