Children’s Adjustment Following Divorce: Risk and Resilience Perspectives

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Overview Literature review on the adjustment, stressors, and risks for children of divorce.

Method Utilized a variety of studies.

Conclusions Although there are differences in the average well-being of children from happy intact families and divorced families, it is also true that a majority of children from divorced families are emotionally well-adjusted.

Stressors of the Divorce Process for Children:
1. Stress of initial separation.
   - Little emotional preparation for children.
   - Children may be inadequately informed by their parents about the divorce.
   - Shifting from one physical space to another can be stressful for children.
2. Parental conflict.
   - Parental conflict is a major stressor for children.
   - 20-25% of children experience high conflict in their parent’s marriage.
   - High conflict will most likely be destructive when post-divorce parents use their children (put them in the middle) in conflicts.
   - It is not uncommon to find one enraged parent and one disengaged parent following divorce.
3. Diminished parenting after divorce.
   - Parents may be preoccupied with their own emotional responses to the divorce.
   - Demands of integrating single parenting, work, and social needs may diminish parenting.
   - Depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, and psychosomatic complaints are more frequent for divorced parents compared to non-divorced parents, which can diminish parenting.
   - Less positive involvement with custodial parent decreases parenting after the divorce.
4. Loss of important relationships
   - The non-resident parent (typically the father) is not around the children as much after the divorce, which can allow the children to have a diminished view of their father’s importance.
   - 18-25% of children have no contact with their non-residential parent 2-3 years after the divorce.
   - Studies have shown that children want to have more time with their fathers.
   - Moving can bring loss of friends, activities, and routines to children.
   - Maternal attitudes may also influence the loss of children visiting their fathers. The study found 20-25% of mothers interfered with their children visiting their fathers.
| 5. Economic opportunities may become decreased.  
  - Divorce often reduces the standard of living for custodial parents and children.  
  - Reduction of economics may be very stressful for children due to not having the money to be involved in the same activities, schools, and leisure activities as they used to.  
  
| 6. Remarriage and re-parenting.  
  - 75% of men and 66% of women remarry after divorce.  
  - 50% of divorced adults will cohabitate before they remarry.  
  - 1/3 of children will live in a remarried or cohabitating family before age 18.  
  - Remarriage is most stressful for children when entered into soon after the divorce.  

**Divorce as a Risk:**  
- Divorce increases the risk for adjustment problems in children and adolescents.  
- Conduct disorders, antisocial behaviors, problems with authority figures and parents can be common for children of divorce.  
- Depression, anxiety, and self-esteem issues have also been found to be associated with children of divorce.  
- Academic problems may also occur for children of divorce.  
- Children of divorce may have problems in relationships as adults.

**Protective Factors:**  
- One of the best predictors for children’s adjustment is the psychological adjustment of custodial parent and the quality of parenting.  
- Parenting behaviors of warmth, emotional support, monitoring, authoritative discipline, and age-appropriate expectations are considered to be protective factors for children.  
- Timing and appropriate parenting by the non-residential parent is considered to be a protective factor as well.  
- Low parental conflict is also a protective factor for children of divorce.  
- 25-25% of parents are considered cooperative, meaning they do joint planning, have flexibility, communicate and coordinate.  
- 50% of parents engage in parallel parenting where there is low conflict, low communication and emotional disengagement.  
- 8-12% of parents continue to have high conflict after the divorce.  
- Education techniques do help decrease conflict.  
- Information attempting to convey to parents that interparental conflict negatively affects children.  
- Information about resources that may help parents resolve their legal conflicts.

| **Implications**  
  - Interventions are most likely to help children if they seek to contain parental conflict, promote authoritative and close relationships between children and both parents, enhance economic stability, and involve children in interventions when appropriate.  
  - Parent education programs that are research based and focused on skill development showed more promise in educating parents and promoting change than did those that are affect based.  
  - Should encourage researchers to develop objective, reliable, and valid measures of the important struggles associated with divorce that can be implemented in schools and/or clinical practice.  