



## Parenting Big Question: How DOES Divorce Affect Teenagers?

By Kelly Nault

### Parenting Question

“After a turbulent 18 years of marriage, I believe my husband and I will be getting a divorce soon. We’ve split up lots of times before (due to both his and my affairs) and we’ve tried counseling, but this time I think it is finally over. There is too much hurt and too much anger. Cliché of me perhaps, but I have stayed because of my kids. I just want to know, how does divorce really affect teenagers? I have two teens: a 14-year-old girl and a 16-year-old boy.”

—Soon-To-Be Single Mom

### Positive Parenting Tip from Kelly Nault Family Counselor and Award Winning Parenting Author:

Dear Soon-To-Be Single Mom:

Bottom line—getting a divorce will rock your teens’ world.

Yet chances are your children have already experienced the negative affects of your strained relationship to your husband. Yongmim Sun, assistant professor at Ohio State, conducted a National Education Longitudinal Study with over 10,000 students and concluded that: “The negative effects that we associate with divorce are actually evident in teens at least one year before the marriage has ended.... It’s not accurate to say divorce doesn’t matter at all, but it is true that much of the damage to adolescents has already occurred before the divorce.” (*Journal of Marriage and Family*, August 2001).

So how will your teens react? There is no way to tell for certain, but generally teens and pre-teens dealing with their parents divorce may become:

1. Angry and highly critical of their parents' decision.
2. Depressed or withdrawn from both parents, while seeking stronger connections with peers.
3. Disillusioned with marriage and feel rejected by one or both parents.
4. Better behaved—hoping that this will save their parents’ marriage.
5. Involved with risk-taking activities (i.e. skipping class, turning to drugs and alcohol,

becoming sexually active, etc.)

6. Withdrawn from one parent as a form of punishment—while taking the side of the other parent.

**Fortunately, you can mitigate some of these negative effects by parenting in a way that:**

1. **Maintains current family routines** (as much as possible) and ensuring that your kids have quality time with both you and your husband.
2. **Resist the urge to lean on your teens for support** and instead seeking counseling and the support of your own friends.
3. **Take a parenting vow of silence whenever you feel compelled to speak ill of your husband** while in the presence of your children.
4. **Ensure that your teens have support from friends and family.** Research suggests that support from extended members of your family and community can make a world of difference when it comes to having your teens successfully survive a divorce.
5. **Finding a counselor for your teens** that they like and can confide in (school counselors are sometimes useful to consult).
6. **Continue to expect respect from your teens** and maintaining your current household rules.

Divorce (and the lead up to divorce) puts a strain on everyone in the family. By striving to make your divorce as amicable as possible, by finding support for your teens and counseling for you, and by staying connected with your children you will get through this—and so will they.

Kelly Nault, MA corporate spokesperson and award winning parenting author of *When You're About To Go Off The Deep End, Don't Take Your Kids With You* inspires moms to put themselves first—for the sake of their children. She shares time-tested tools that motivate children to want to be well behaved, responsible and happy! Sign up for her free online parenting course at [www.UltimateParenting.com](http://www.UltimateParenting.com).

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