



## THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL DISCORD AND DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

A child's sense of well-being relates to her parents' well-being. The single best predictor of children's behavioral and emotional difficulties is parental discord. Therefore, parents should:

- Minimize your children's exposure to parental conflict
- Conduct business related to separation and divorce apart from your children
- Attempt to regain composure quickly, seek divorce counseling, family or individual therapy
- Maintain existing household rules and structure to enhance your children's sense of security and continuity
- Give your children time to relearn rules when they return from visiting the other parent
- Seek an amiable settlement, being respectful and mindful of the needs of the custodial and non-custodial parents to get along with each other
- Avoid talking negatively about the other parent to your children
- Avoid bribing children, involving children in visitation planning, or using children as a bargaining chip for concessions
- Abide by the terms of the agreement, seeking legal counsel when changes are needed
- Talk with children calmly and briefly about the reasons for the divorce
- Tell the children they are not the reason or cause for the divorce
- Take these steps to build your children's self-esteem
  - Show interest in your child and her activities
  - Act in a loving manner
  - Express enjoyment in parenting
  - Accept your child's strengths and weaknesses
  - Treat your child respectfully
- Observe your child for signs of difficulties. Many children have great difficulty adjusting to divorce and need short-term counseling to understand that they are not responsible. Signs include increased acting out, taking too much responsibility for household chores and siblings, excessive crying, withdrawal, anger, or sadness.