Parents.

Kids & Divorce

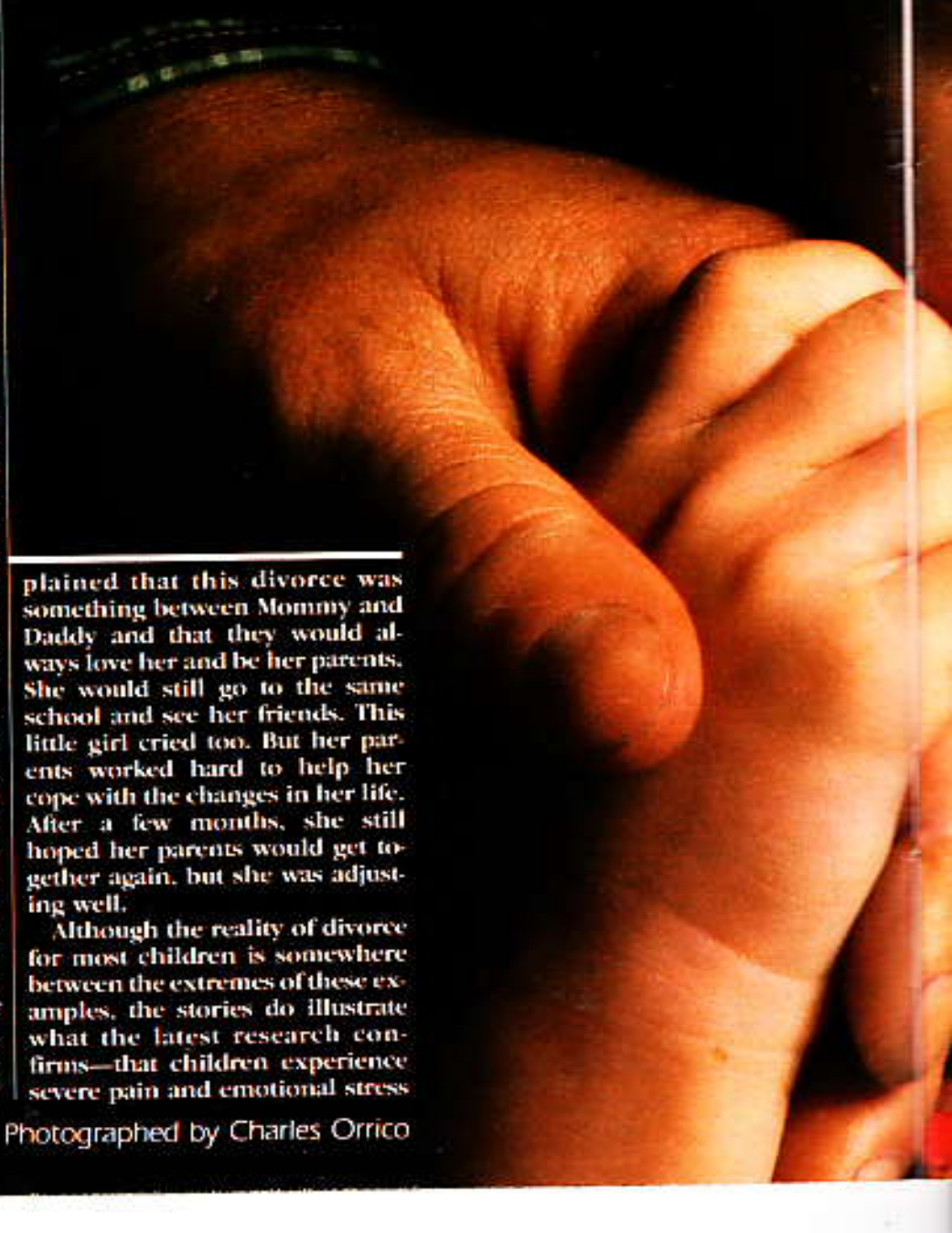
Steps you take to help your child cope with your divorce can make a big difference in how she adjusts —right from the start.

By Elin McCoy

One sunny morning, a four-year-old boy came down to breakfast expecting to see his daddy. But his daddy wasn't there. His mother told him, "Daddy's left and he's never coming back. Mommy and Daddy are getting a divorce." Over a bowl of cereal, the little boy's world fell apart. He screamed when his mother left him at nursery school that morning and spent most of his day hitting other children or standing in a corner by himself sucking his thumb, something he hadn't done for a year. One month later they moved to another apartment. His mother wouldn't let his father see him, and whenever he was naughty, which was much of the time, she told him, "You're as bad as your father." When he finally saw his father three months later, he told his son how awful his mother was. Three years later this little boy was still confused and upset, and his mother was desperate.

In another home, a six-year-old girl sat down in the living room with her parents after dinner. They told her that Mommy and Daddy couldn't get along anymore and had trouble living together, so they had decided, after a lot of thought and trying, to get a divorce. This meant, they said, that Mommy and Daddy would live in different houses. She would live with Mommy most of the time, but Daddy wouldn't live far away, and she would visit him at his new house soon. They explained that this divorce was something between Mommy and Daddy and that they would always love her and be her parents. She would still go to the same school and see her friends. This little girl cried too. But her parents worked hard to help her cope with the changes in her life. After a few months, she still hoped her parents would get together again, but she was adjusting well.

Although the reality of divorce for most children is somewhere between the extremes of these examples, the stories do illustrate what the latest research confirms—that children experience severe pain and emotional stress



Photographed by Charles Orrico

". . .One thing that kids need in order to adjust to life after a divorce is a good relationship with a well-functioning parent. . . ."

when their family life is disrupted, but the effects of divorce depend to a large extent on what kind of divorce it is. How parents handle the divorce and what happens in the family afterwards are crucial to how well or how badly the children adjust from the start and perhaps all their lives. With the help of their parents the majority of children do weather the crisis and adjust within two to three years.

That divorce does not have to be devastating to children is good news, especially in light of recent statistics. The dramatic rise in the divorce rate since the 1960s (one in every two recent marriages is projected to end in divorce) has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of children of divorce—over one million new children each year for the past ten years. Census Bureau statistics show that one quarter of all the children in the United States were living in single-parent families in 1982, 90 percent headed by a mother, and the reason in the majority of cases was separation and divorce. The greatest number of children were between six and eight years of age at the time of divorce.

This trend does not bode well. According to Dr. Frank Furstenberg, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania, 40 to 50 percent of all children born after 1975 will not be living with both their biological parents by the age of eighteen. The adjustments these children will have to make are tremendous. Researchers have found that death in the family, parents separating, and parents divorcing are the three life events requiring the greatest adjustment for children.

Parents themselves are in the best position to help their children through a divorce, but in order to do this, they have to realize how their children are likely to feel and why, what kinds of changes in the household are particularly upsetting for their children, and understand that there is a timetable for adjustment.

For children (and adults, too) divorce is not just one dramatic event—one parent leaving the family home. Instead that event sets in motion a complex chain of changes and transitions for children that take place over a period of time. "Changes for children become critical at the time of the decision to separate," says Dr. Judith Wallerstein, executive director of the Center for the Family in Transition in Corte Madera, California. After this crisis phase there is a time of disequilibrium and reorganization during which children and parents are trying to adjust, to work out their new lives and relationships. "We've found things usually get worse before they get better," observes Dr. E. Mavis Hetherington, chairman of the psychology department at the University of Virginia, who has been researching the effects of divorce on children for many years. "One year following the divorce is usually the low point." Often at the two- to three-year mark, though, a newly organized and structured family stabilizes, but parents can expect their children's concern with the divorce to resurface at different points in their lives.

The crisis phase: how children react.

The period just following the parents' announcement to separate or divorce is a traumatic one for most children, even if parents handle it well. In The California Children of Divorce Project, a long-term study of 60 divorcing California families conducted by Wallerstein and Joan Berlin Kelly, few children were relieved to hear their parents were separating, even if they had frequently witnessed fights between their parents. Among the 131 children ages two to eighteen in their study, the researchers identified some central themes in the initial reactions of children of all ages.

- Most children express shock, surprise, and denial—it's the "this can't be happening to me" syndrome.
- Most children are anxious and frightened about what will happen to them and feel their world is no longer predictable.
- Most children are angry at their parents.
- Most children are visibly sad, depressed, and moody.
- Most children feel rejected.
- Most children are lonely.
- Most children find themselves caught between their parents in a conflict of loyalties.
- Most children harbor fantasies of their parents reconciling. Some work hard to try to get their parents back together.

Although these are general reactions of a wide variety and age of children, parents will find that even children in the same family vary considerably in how these reactions translate into changes in moods and behavior at home and school—and in how long they last. One reason for these differences is a child's age.

The age factor.

Children of different age groups are engaged in different developmental tasks, and dealing with the divorce and related stresses can interfere with their particular stage of development.

Babies and toddlers depend on their parents for continuity and feel any distress that affects their primary parent—usually the mother. They may become more possessive, have sleep problems, or go back to earlier, less mature behavior in order to feel more secure.

It is the children in the next two age groups—three to five and six to eight—who seem to be the hardest hit by divorce, at least initially. Children in these age groups are old enough to feel keenly the emotional tensions and parental problems during and after a divorce, but not yet able to sort out what is happening, either their parents' motives and feelings or their own role in the situation. They feel particularly vulnerable. Preschoolers who are just learning to separate from their parents are often fearful of being abandoned altogether after one parent leaves. One mother recalled vividly the way her three-year-old held on to her leg with all his strength whenever she was going out, sobbing "Don't leave me, don't leave me." Typical behavior of preschool children of divorce also includes refusing to go to bed, lest their parent leave while they sleep, and relapsing to such immature behaviors as bedwet-

CHILD'S DRESS ON PAGES 112 AND 113 BY NANNETTE

ting. Expressing fears through unfocused anger that strikes out at anything and everything is also common.

In their study comparing 48 preschool children of divorce with 48 from intact families, Mavis Hetherington and her coresearchers Roger and Martha Cox further explored the effects of divorce on preschoolers. They found that boys and girls of divorce were more likely to disobey and oppose whatever their mother wanted them to do, nagged and whined more often, and refused to play by themselves—unlike children from intact families. In nursery school, they tended to watch groups of children but made no attempt to join them, more often wandered around unoccupied, and were less involved in imaginative play. In fantasy play they often assumed the role of victim or aggressor. They shared and helped less and demanded more attention and assistance. Two years after the divorce they were scoring lower on achievement and IQ tests. "What deteriorates is performance in problem-solving that requires sustained attention," says Hetherington. "One of the crucial things in cognitive as well as emotional development is a predictable environment. Where divorced mothers had poor control of their kids, the kids were distractible and inattentive and the scores dropped; when the mother exerted good control, they didn't."

Children in the six-to-eight or nine-year age group are beginning to take their first steps toward independence from their family to a wider world of school and friendships. For them divorce takes time and emotional energy that is withdrawn from schoolwork and social relationships. In Wallerstein and Kelly's study, the most striking responses of children this age were overwhelming sadness and exaggerated grief. Children were unable to convince themselves that any aspect of their lives was all right and simply lost the desire to do anything. For some this lasted as long as a year. Observes Dr. Kathleen Camara-Ryan, an assistant professor at Tufts University's Eliot Pearson Child Study Center, "Often children this age become very protective of their parents and hold a lot of their family worries in, especially if they are concerned about their parents' stability. This stems partly from the fact that middle years children are very literal-minded and often take seriously what parents say in a moment of anger or depression. Anger, feelings of betrayal and deprivation are other reactions. For some, particularly boys, there is a yearning for the father. Many mothers find their children become very attached to whomever they are going out with, only to see them dissolve in grief again when the relationship ends."

Younger children (under age nine, usually) also have unrealistic fantasies about what the divorce will mean. One child poignantly voiced his fear that his father would get a new little boy. In addition, younger children have greater difficulty in accepting the divorce and giving up hope for a reconciliation.

Unlike younger children, nine- to twelve-year-olds have a buffer against the divorce in their growing activities at school and with friends. Their greater emotional and intellectual maturity better enables them to understand the reasons for their parents' divorce and to see the divorce as separate from themselves. But the divorce comes at a bad time in terms of other developmental tasks. Children this age are trying to establish a code of behavior. *(Continued on page 192)*

Helping Kids Cope

Before: breaking the news.

- If possible, both parents, together, should tell the children about the separation before one parent leaves. Plan on a transition time if you can.
- Explain why you are getting a divorce in terms the children can understand. Avoid placing blame on either parent and don't confide sexual problems.
- Don't expect children to clearly comprehend the divorce right away. Be prepared to explain over and over again.
- Stress that this decision is an adult one, that the children had nothing to do with it.
- Be honest about what this will mean in their lives—whom they will live with and where.
- Reassure the children that both parents will continue to love them and that they will be free to love both parents.

After: restructuring the family.

- Set up a good visiting situation right away, unless the other parent has serious psychological problems or has abused the children.
- Keep changes to a minimum for a while. If possible, don't move; if you must move try to keep the children at the same school. Keep the household schedule predictable.
- Don't disparage your spouse to the children. Don't ask them questions about his or her dating companions.
- Set aside special times to be with your children each day, no matter how busy you are.
- Help your children resume their normal activities as soon as possible.
- Inform your children's teachers. Ask them to let you know if they notice changes in your children's behavior and work.
- Don't lean on your children for emotional support and make sure they're not overburdened with household tasks.
- Reestablish a human-relationship network in your community as soon as possible.
- Don't assume that all problems are a result of divorce.
- Get professional help if your children's problems seem particularly severe or if they continue longer than one year. ●

(From page 116) a sense of right and wrong. One father described his son's reactions this way: "My son used to give me lectures. I had been a creep to his mother, he said. He'd never forgive me, and I should realize he'd always hate me. The first year after the divorce I got so I dreaded seeing him every Sunday."

Because of intense anger, some children this age are particularly vulnerable to being enlisted as an ally of one parent against the other. Sometimes children's anger also spills over into school; truancy, cheating, low achievement, petty thievery, aggressiveness against other children may be the result. Other children are weighed down by too many responsibilities in the household and develop headaches, stomachaches, or digestive problems.

Divorce affects teenagers in other ways. Adolescence is a turbulent time, and divorce often complicates it. For some teenagers it exacerbates already existing problems, but for most "the main issue is the meaning of divorce in terms of their own identity, their life goals, and whom they will be allowed to love," says Dr. Lora Heims Tessman, whose study of children of divorce is chronicled in her book, *Children of Parting Parents* (J. Aronson). Some become very anxious about forming relationships because they question whether love can endure. Others will go to extreme lengths to try to make a relationship work. Worry about money and how they will be able to go on to college, anger at a parent's dating at a time when the teenager's own sexuality is developing, as well as feelings of responsibility for their parents are other common reactions.

Moreover, parents' self-absorption during and after the divorce often means the family no longer provides a good base for needed refueling and confidence building, or for setting limits on behavior.

Research has found, though, that adolescents who cope best are usually those who *do* withdraw from the family emotionally for a year or so and throw themselves into schoolwork and relationships with friends.

The sex factor.

Study after study documenting the effects of divorce includes the words "particularly in boys." In the studies of preschool children that Hetherington conducted with Roger and Martha Cox, boys' and girls' behavior in nursery school was similar at two months after the divorce, though boys tended to be more aggressive. But two years after the divorce, when the behavior of girls from divorced homes once again parallelled those from nondivorced homes, boys from divorced homes were still behaving in a hostile and aggressive way, though they had improved. Hetherington notes that boys received less support from teachers than girls did.

At home, young boys seem to remain angry with their mothers for a period of about two years, while girls do not. Mothers and sons, Hetherington and her colleagues found, seem to get caught in a "coercive cycle" as early as two months after the divorce: mothers are ineffectively authoritarian, while boys refuse to obey; this in turn increases a mother's feelings of incompetence, which leads to further deterioration of the relationship.

Interestingly, Hetherington found that divorced mothers, too, did not reinforce boys' good or improved behavior as frequently as they did girls'. They also shielded their daughters from parental fights more than they did their sons.

During adolescence, however, girls' problems seem to catch up with boys', whether parents divorce then or earlier in their lives. Explains Dr. Neil Kalter, associate professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, "When girls are young their main tasks are doing well in school and identifying with their mothers. But in adolescence they need to know they're important to the opposite sex. A very young girl may think her father left because there's something wrong with her. In adolescence these girls often feel particularly unattractive." They're more likely than boys to engage in precocious sexual behavior, and they tend to have much more bitter conflicts with their mothers than do boys—or girls whose parents aren't divorced.

"...'Even adolescents need a parent on whom they can rely. If parents communicate that they're upset, they also have to communicate that they can handle it.'..."

Individual temperament and past experience.

A child's own temperament and mental health also account for some differences. Researchers have found that the children who were very well adjusted before the divorce were usually the ones who adjusted best.

Past experience also plays an influential role. Psychiatrist Michael Rutter explains that most children can handle a stressful experience, such as a divorce, but if it comes on the heels of other stressful experiences, death in the family or severe illness, for example, they will have more trouble dealing with it.

To determine why some kids seem to cope well and others do badly, researchers have focused on just what happens in separating and divorcing families during and after the divorce. The truth is that even parents who are concerned about their children and who want to help them frequently contribute to and even create the problems and unhappiness of their children. Often they fail to recognize childrens' signals of distress. There is usually a great difference between what is going on in the home of a divorced child who is adjusting well and one who is doing badly.

Why problems develop.

Parenting deteriorates. The most obvious household change is that one parent moves out. But while that is devastating for children, the changes in mood, behavior, and amount of time spent with the remaining parent affect children even more. Studies show that one thing kids need in order to be able to adjust is a good relationship with a well-functioning parent. Unfortunately, a majority of par-

ents are so wrapped up in their own troubles that they don't give their children either the emotional support or the attention they need.

Households of newly divorced parents are much more disorganized than two-parent households. "Children are more likely to have pickup meals at irregular times and to have more erratic bedtimes," says Mavis Hetherington. This lack of structure in their lives seems to be especially frightening to young children.

Parents don't communicate with their children about the divorce. In Wallerstein and Kelly's study, for example, 80 percent of the preschool children were not told before one parent left. These children simply woke up one morning to find one parent gone. It is not surprising that they may be terrified whenever the remaining parent leaves the room. Discussing the divorce with children and helping them understand why it occurred can lead to better adjustment.

Parents do not shield their children from their conflicts. About two-thirds of all divorcing parents fight bitterly, often violently, both before the divorce and for the first year or so afterward, according to many researchers, and few worry whether their children are present.

After a divorce, many parents also actively compete for their children's love and allegiance and frequently denigrate their spouses, creating painful conflicts of loyalty in their children, who love both their parents and don't want to choose between them. Continuing conflict between parents results in more behavioral problems in their children.

Many studies have shown, however, that children are eventually better off in a divorced home where fighting has subsided than they are in a family where the parents are still married but fight all the time.

Most children lose a father. "I miss my Daddy so, so much," sighed one eight-year-old. "He hardly ever comes to see me. He didn't send me a birthday card either. I guess he doesn't love me anymore, just like he doesn't love Mommy." Mothers usually have custody of their children after a divorce, while fathers often become the other parent—someone to visit, someone who entertains, rather than a parent to whom a child can turn with problems. Yet keeping fathers involved is very important for children: those who see their fathers regularly and have a good relationship with them are generally happier with their family life, have higher self-esteem, work better in school, and have better relationships with their friends. It helps children understand that they were not responsible for the divorce, helps them realize they won't be abandoned, and prevents their feelings of being rejected and therefore unlovable. It also contributes to good sex role development in *both* boys and girls.

Most divorced families live on a much reduced income. Women

who have custody of their children usually experience a sudden and drastic downturn in family income—50 percent according to one University of Michigan survey. The same income is stretched thin when it has to serve two households. But a more important reason is that the majority of fathers pay no child support. According to a 1981 Census Bureau report, nearly one-third of mothers eligible for support do not receive anything at all, and most who do, get only 20 percent of their income from child-support payments. Some have no choice but to go on welfare. A high percentage of divorced mothers do work, but most make far less than their ex-husbands do. More and more, divorced mothers are being described as the "new poor" in America. Some researchers blame the economic situation of divorced mothers for many of the problems their children have that others have attributed to the divorce itself.

Parents often expect too much from their children. Most newly separated and divorced parents turn to their children for household help and sometimes even emotional support. As a result, the children take on new roles and responsibilities at a time when they're trying to cope with many other changes in their lives. Dr. Robert Weiss, a professor of sociology at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, who has studied the family life of single-parent families, reports that children in single-parent households often seem more mature, self-reliant, responsible, and independent at an earlier age than children in two-parent households. Parents often share their own adult tensions, uncertainties, and concerns about their lives and work with them. This can have certain advantages. Some parents, for example, report that there's more sharing, more communication, and more negotiation with their children, and a closer and better relationship between them. Other divorced parents see in their children more empathy and compassion for others as well as a more realistic view of their parents and the world as a result of this kind of sharing.

But while some of this can be seen in a positive light, there is a dark side. In many households, children are asked to do too much. Young children can't make their own meals or put themselves to bed and are often bewildered by being privy to some kinds of information or being asked for advice.

When young children are called upon to "mother" their parents, they often rise to the occasion but only at great personal cost. Weiss explains, "Even adolescents need a parent on whom they can rely. If parents communicate that they're upset, they also have to communicate that they can handle it. While children may be able to handle a lot of responsibility, parents should be aware that later they may resent not having had a more carefree childhood."

Does divorce mark children for life?

Are children of divorce doomed to be unhappy adults, as some parents worry? The answer is probably not. But there is considerable disagreement among parents, psychologists, sociologists, and children of divorce themselves as to how long the effects of divorce last. Some studies have found only 15 to 25 percent of children still having problems five years after the divorce, and many of them had had problems before the divorce. Of the 131 children in Wallerstein and Kelly's study, a little more than a third were still very unhappy and troubled, and a little less than a third were moderately well-adjusted though still angry and unhappy. Only a third were doing very well.

Now Wallerstein is evaluating the ten-year follow-up of the children in the study. While behavioral and academic problems often don't last, feelings do. "It's quite clear that for the children the divorce has been the main event of their childhood and adolescence," she says. "It looms as something they think about all the time and apply to the meaning of their own lives. The day that Daddy left remains significant." Although most children now accept the divorce and even approve of it, "sadness, a sense of loss about 'the family they didn't have,' and a sense of loneliness seem to endure." The sense of loss was greatest, perhaps not surprisingly, where the visiting arrangement with the father was unsatisfactory.

Another significant finding of Wallerstein's follow-up is that children who are older at the time of divorce seem to be more hindered by their memories in the long run. Although preschoolers were initially the most affected, ten years after the divorce they had forgotten much of the trauma and seemed to have recovered. But some of the older children (nine and up) had vivid memories of their suffering and were troubled about the unreliability of relationships.

Frank Furstenberg cautions, however, that "just because divorce is remembered as a painful time doesn't mean children will be psychologically damaged as adults."

Other factors also enter the picture. Researchers Richard Kulka and Helen Weingarten of the University of Michigan examined two national surveys of adults from divorced and nondivorced homes. When they separated the effects of divorce from other stresses, such as financial difficulties, experiencing divorce as a child appeared to have only a very modest effect on later life adjustment. Depression about or satisfaction with their lives was just as likely in adults from both types of backgrounds. Adult children of divorce do seem to think about marriage and divorce in different ways, however: women in their study, for example, saw children and work as more important than their role as wife and tended to be more conscientious mothers. Men, on the other hand, had a weaker investment in being a parent than those from nondivorced backgrounds. They were also more likely to see divorce as a good solution to marital problems. Kulka and Weingarten also found that men from divorced backgrounds seem to cope less well with difficult situations as adults—in the same way that boys have more difficulty adjusting to the divorce in the first place.

Help for divorcing parents.

For most parents marital divorce is a time of extraordinary stress for themselves, and even though they

Books on Divorce

For Parents

Growing Up Divorced by Linda Bird Francke (Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, $15.95.) This book is a "must-read" for divorcing or separating parents. Most helpful are the five chapters that contain short descriptions of typical experiences and psychological reactions of children to divorce at different ages.

Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Shared Custody Work by Isolina Ricci (Macmillan, $5.95.) A practical, systematic guide to how parents can work together as parents after a divorce. It provides checklists, self-surveys, sample agreements, and examples of what other divorcing parents have found useful.

For Preschoolers

Mommy and Daddy are Divorced by Patricia Perry and Marietta Lynch. (Dial Books for the Very Young, $6.95.) Two preschool boys with divorced parents describe what they do when they are with their mother and what they do when they visit their father.

Divorce is a Grown-Up Problem by Janet Sinberg (Avon Books, $4.95.) Line drawings and simple text show divorce from a child's point of view, focusing on questions and feelings many children have about divorce.

Ages 5 to 9

Two Homes to Live In: A Child's-Eye View of Divorce by Barbara Shook Hazen (Human Sciences Press, $4.95.) Niki shares her feelings about her parents' divorce and wishes her parents would get married again. Nicely illustrated.

I Have Two Families by Doris Wild Helmering and John William (Abingdon Press, $8.95.) A story about an eight-year-old girl and her brother, who live most of the time with their father and dog and sometimes with their mother and cat.

Talking about Divorce and Separation: A Dialogue between Parent and Child by Earl Grollman. (Beacon Press, $5.50.) A book designed to encourage communication between parents and children. The first part, a simple narrative for children that explains what a divorce is. The second part, for parents, gives advice on how parents can encourage their children to talk. Contains good bibliographies and resource sections.

Preteens and Adolescents

It's Not the End of the World by Judy Blume. (Dell, $2.50.) Sixth-grader Karen Newman tells how her parents decided to get a divorce and how it affects her teenage brother, her younger sister, and herself.

The Kids' Book of Divorce By, For, and About Kids by the Unit at Fayerweather Street School. Edited by Eric E. Rofes. (Vintage Books, $3.95.) A collection of reflections, experiences, and feelings of twenty boys and girls ages eleven to fourteen whose parents are divorced.

The Boys and Girls Book About Divorce by Richard Gardner. (Bantam, $2.95.) A nonfiction self-help book of good advice written by a prominent psychiatrist. Some of the ideas are controversial, so parents should read the book first.

The Divorce Express by Paula Danziger. (Laurel Leaf, $2.25.) Fourteen-year-old Phoebe splits her life between two homes. Then, just as she has adjusted to everything, her mother announces plans to marry someone Phoebe doesn't like. ◉

Kids & Divorce (Continued)

may want to do the right thing for their children, they don't always know what to do or where to turn for help. Fortunately, though, there has been a considerable increase in support systems for divorced parents and children alike. Mental-health centers, churches, community centers, Ys, schools, and family service agencies now offer support groups and workshops for divorced parents where they can talk and get information. Perhaps the best known and certainly the largest support group is *Parents Without Partners, Inc.*, which has branches throughout the country (7910 Woodmont Avenue, Bethesda, Md. 20814; (301) 654-8850 is their main office). The Family Service Association of America (44 E. 23rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10010; (212) 674-6100) is another place to turn for information about a group near you. Most of these also provide support groups for children.

Divorce mediation. Many experts believe that the traditional adversarial process of getting a divorce escalates parents' bitter feelings rather than encouraging them to find a way for both partners to continue as parents. Divorce mediation, on the other hand, stresses avoiding discussions of blame and negotiating solutions through marathon bargaining sessions before parents go to court. The methods used in mediation also provide a model for future negotiating between parents and help them set up a working relationship with their children. Results of mediation are encouraging and many parents all over the country are turning to private divorce mediators. (For a list of qualified mediators, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Academy of Family Mediators, 111 4th Avenue, Suite IN, New York, N.Y. 10003.)

New forms of custody. Today the most prevalent custody arrangement after divorce is mother-custody, in which children live with their mother who has complete legal jurisdiction over them while the father has "visitation rights." But the view that this is best for children is changing. Texas psychologists Richard Warshak and John Santrock, for instance, have found that boys seem to do better in father-custody arrangements. Perhaps one reason boys have so much trouble adjusting to the divorce is that they live with their mothers exclusively, the psychologists suggest.

Another custody variation is joint custody, in which parents have equal legal rights and responsibilities in decisions affecting their child's life. In some cases this includes joint physical custody, in which children live with each parent for approximately the same amount of time. This arrangement is still controversial, however. Dr. Albert J. Solnit, director of the Child Study Center at Yale University, points out that people usually get divorced because they cannot get along. "It's not logical to assume that angry parents will be able to work together," he comments. Psychologists are also concerned about a disadvantage for young children—the confusion and insecurity of moving back and forth between homes.

Nonetheless, Dr. Deborah Luepnitz of the Philadelphia Child Guidance Clinic, who studied 50 parents and 91 children in several custody arrangements, concludes that "joint custody at its best is superior to single-parent custody at its best," primarily because children spend more time with both parents and seem to have better relationships with them. Parents also feel less overburdened and more able to be good parents. But for joint custody to work really well for children takes enormous commitment from both parents. It works best for those children who can get easily from one home to another and where parents are willing to put the children first.

In the long run however, the legal custody arrangement isn't as important as *how* the parents work together. Luepnitz found that it was parental conflict, regardless of custody arrangement, that resulted in poor adjustment for children.

The best solution: a secure family life.

Divorce *is* changing the way children grow up because it's changing the families they grow up in. But children still need the things they have always needed—parents who love them, a home that's not filled with conflict and tension, and a secure financial situation—in their new family. It's up to parents to help them have those things, even when they're divorcing, and to continue to provide a family life that is nurturing, supportive, and ultimately rewarding. ◉

Elin McCoy writes frequently on children and learning.

(From page 84) "It's not 'Susie is our pet and we're going to take Susie for a ride.' Then all of a sudden you've got sausage on the table. He knows that Susie is going to be a ham."

"I think, too," Garrett adds, "that he gets an understanding of the whole concept that if pigs weren't being raised for food, they would be on the extinct-species list. Nobody would want to devote space and valuable food products to pigs that weren't going to be eaten. As a species, their whole being is developed around being eaten."

He continues: "I want to protect my children from never getting a deep understanding of anything—of passing through life and never understanding why or what happened."

Growing up with nature, Hope and Garrett also believe, presents the opportunity for their children to develop a sense of self-reliance. Being involved in sailing while growing up, Hope says, allowed her to develop this quality along with the ability to size up other people. "You had to ask yourself, would I want to be in a boat with my life dependent upon these people," she explains. "Here you are often in the position of dealing with nature and relying on yourself or one or two others to pull things through. And to me, this is a more natural way to experience that.

"The boys get to know animals—which ones they can chase, which [illegible]. They learn to respect

whether Charles and James will develop that same sense of self-sufficiency. "With Johnny, his personality is such that he doesn't require the support of a lot of his contemporaries' cultural trappings," Hope says. "I hope that will be true with the other boys. What that will show us is whether this is totally viable for an Olmsted subculture, or whether it's just something that's worked so far for the three of us who are old enough to have dealt with the outside world."

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"I think, too," Garrett adds, "that he gets an understanding of the whole concept that if pigs weren't being raised for food, they would be on the extinct-species list. Nobody would want to devote space and valuable food products to pigs that weren't going to be eaten. As a species, their whole being is developed around being eaten."

He continues: "I want to protec children from never getting a understanding of anything—of ing through life and never u standing why or what happenec

Growing up with nature, Hope Garrett also believe, presents the portunity for their children to dev a sense of self-reliance. Being volved in sailing while growing Hope says, allowed her to dev this quality along with the abilit size up other people. "You had tc yourself, would I want to be in a with my life dependent upon t people," she explains. "Here you often in the position of dealing nature and relying on yourself or or two others to pull things thro And to me, this is a more natural to experience that.

"The boys get to know anima which ones they can chase, w ones they can't. They learn to res the creek if it's up. And when down, they know they can play i

"Even the little ones are very c ble already," Hope says. "If you're repairing fences, they go with You can tell James to get the fe staples, and he'll hold them for and feel part of the job. Everyb works together. It may not be cient, but they are part of the tea

As a result of no TV, Johnny dc lot of reading. "He reads most of same books I read," Garrett note

"But he still gets along with peers," Hope adds. "He doesn't s to have had to see the Super Bow Sunday to go to school Monday get along with the other kids. He enough self-assurance to feel th doesn't matter if they're reading Hardy Boys and complaining abo and he's reading Moby Dick bec he wants to."

The question in her mind nov whether Charles and James will develop that same sense of self-sufficiency. "With Johnny, his personality is such that he doesn't require the support of a lot of his contemporaries' cultural trappings," Hope says. "I hope that will be true with the other boys. What that will show us is whether this is totally viable for an Olmsted subculture, or whether it's just something that's worked so far for the three of us who are old enough to have dealt with the outside world."