

## ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE: 10 SURPRISING FACTS PARENTS MIGHT NOT KNOW

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It's no secret these days that baby boomers have the highest divorce rate of any age group. Yet, few people realize that, because so many of the over 50 crowd are getting divorced now, adult children of divorce have become their own special breed of divorce casualties.

Fifty years ago, only 2.8% of Americans over 50 were divorced. Today, more than 15% of Americans over 50 are divorced.

What's more, even though the divorce rate for the general population is falling, the divorce rate for those over 50 has more than doubled since 1990. The divorce rate for those over 65 has more than tripled.

All that means that the number of adults who will face the challenge of having their older parents' divorce has skyrocketed.

### ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE: THE FORGOTTEN DEMOGRAPHIC

No one thinks about the effect of divorce on adult children. Few researchers have studied adult children of divorce. That's probably because, until recently, there weren't all that many adult children of divorce to study.

Today, that's changed.

Yet, even while the research lags, it's clear that adult children of divorce have different issues and concerns than younger children.

True, the age and maturity level of an adult child can make dealing with divorce easier in some ways. But it also makes it harder in others.

### 7 WAYS DIVORCE CAN BE HARDER ON ADULT CHILDREN

Here are 7 problems that adult children of divorce must deal with, that younger children don't:

1. Parents KNOW that divorce will hurt their young children, but they ASSUME that it won't affect their adult children.
2. Parents of young children usually don't lean on their kids for emotional support during and after their divorce. Yet, parents of adult children often do.

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3. Divorcing Parents of adult children tend to overshare intimate details of their marriage and new dating lives with their adult children. This makes it more likely that the kids will take sides. (It also makes their kids wildly uncomfortable!)
4. Because there is no court-ordered parenting schedule, it's often harder for adult children to repair broken relationships with a divorced parent.
5. A late in life divorce threatens older adults' financial security. Their adult children are often left having to financially support one or both parents during and after their divorce.
6. A late in life divorce also strips older adults of social support. Whereas aging parents are often able to support each other while they're married, when they divorce, the kids must pick up the slack.
7. Adult children of divorce often carry incredible amounts of anger and guilt over their parents' divorce. They are angry that their parents didn't divorce earlier. They also feel guilty that their parents stayed together just for them.

## 10 SURPRISING FACTS DIVORCING PARENTS WITH ADULT CHILDREN NEED TO KNOW

While the challenges that adult children of divorce face may be different than younger children, the ways that parents can help their kids adjust is surprisingly similar. If you are a divorcing parent, here are 10 "not so obvious" tips for helping your adult children cope with your divorce.

## YOU STILL NEED TO REMIND YOUR KIDS THAT YOUR DIVORCE IS NOT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY

Divorcing parents with young children are encouraged to assure their kids that their divorce is not their kids' fault. That's because young children tend to blame themselves for their parent's divorce. They feel guilty for "causing" the divorce.

What parents of adult children might not realize is that adult children also feel guilty about their parent's divorce, but in a different way.

Adult children might not feel like they caused their parent's divorce. But, if they think their parents only stayed married for their sake, they often feel just as guilty for causing their parent's unhappiness. After all, who wants to think that their parents suffered for years, just because of them?

**What You Can Do:** Talk to your kids. Assure them that your decision to divorce when you did was completely YOUR decision (or your spouse's decision), not theirs. Remind them that, even though they may be an adult, you are still their parent. You did, and will continue to do, what

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you believe is best for them, and for you. Remind them too, that they are not responsible for your life or your happiness – you are.

## REMEMBER THAT YOUR DIVORCE IS THEIR LOSS TOO

Divorcing people usually get caught up in their own emotions. That's normal. But, when you're a divorcing parent, you need to remember that your kids are going to be emotional about your divorce too.

That's easy to remember when you're a divorcing parent with young children. Everyone from your divorce lawyer to your great Aunt Nellie will remind you to take extra care of your kids during your divorce.

But no one says anything about your adult children. No one tells parents of adults that their divorce will rock their children's world, no matter how old they are.

**What You Can Do:** Don't just talk to your kids – listen to them! Ask them what they think, and how they feel. Then shut up and listen! When you're in pain yourself, and your whole world has just been turned upside down, that's not easy. But, if you love your kids, giving them a safe space to talk about their emotions – even when you don't like what they're saying – is one of the best things you can do.

## YOU'VE STILL GOT TO GET ALONG WITH YOUR EX.

Everyone knows that divorcing parents of young kids need to find a way to get along with each other after their divorce. They will still have to see each other at their kids' soccer games and music recitals. For the kids' sake, they need to get along when they pick them up or drop them off. In short, they must find a way to parent their children at least a little peacefully until the kids are eighteen.

Adult children, on the other hand, don't need any active parenting. So, it's easy for older divorcing parents to assume that whether they get along with their ex or not really doesn't matter that much. ... It does.

While you might not have to argue with your ex about your kids' homework anymore, you are both still going to have to show up as parents at weddings, graduations, funerals, and family events. So, like it or not, you've still got to find a way to get along with your ex, even if it's only on special occasions. You don't want to be "those" parents who can't even be in the same room together at their kid's wedding without making a scene.

**What You Can Do:** The way you go through your divorce makes a huge difference in how well you and your ex will get along after your divorce. Don't turn your divorce into a war. Use mediation or Collaborative Divorce to resolve your issues if you can. Get yourself a therapist and work through your anger and pain. Do whatever you have to do so that, in the future, you can at least be civil to your ex when you need to be.

## YOUR KIDS ARE NOT THERE FOR YOUR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Most divorcing parents with young children know better than to cry on their kids' shoulders when they are going through a divorce. They do their best to hide their worst emotional upsets from their kids. They maintain their role as "parent" and try not to dump all their emotional angst on their kids.

Parents of adult children, however, typically don't feel the same need to protect their kids from their divorce drama. They assume that, since their kids are adults, they're old enough to deal with the reality of divorce.

What they may not realize is that even adults have trouble dealing with the reality of *their parent's* divorce.

**What You Can Do:** It's fine to talk to your kids about your divorce in broad terms, but please, spare them the details! If you're having trouble dealing with your emotions, get a therapist. Don't dump on your kids. They have their own emotions about your divorce that they must deal with. They don't need to deal with your emotions, too. (And, for heaven's sake, don't tell your kids the "secrets" you don't want their other parent to know! That is totally unfair to your kids!)

## FORCING YOUR KIDS TO TAKE SIDES IN YOUR DIVORCE CAN TEAR YOUR FAMILY APART FOREVER.

While you may think that only young children can be alienated from their parents, the truth is that ANY child can be alienated from his/her parents. If you tell your kids enough horrible stuff about their other parent, they're either going to hate that parent, hate you, or hate both of you.

What's even worse is that your divorce can make your children hate each other, too. If one of your kid's sides with you in the divorce and the other sides with your ex, not only are you and your spouse going to be at odds, but your kids will turn on each other too.

Even if all your kids take the same side in your divorce, they can still turn on each other later. If one of your children decides at some point to forgive the "bad" parent, and his brothers and sisters don't agree, your kids may turn on each other in the future. That will put the forgiving child in the unfortunate position of having to choose between having a relationship with his/her parent and having a relationship with his/her brothers and sisters.

**What You Can Do:** Take the high road! When it comes to your spouse, don't overshare personal information with your children! Don't try to make your spouse look bad to the kids. Remember that your spouse is your kids' other parent! They deserve to have a relationship with both of their parents. Do your best not to ruin that for them.

## GETTING RID OF THE FAMILY HOME MAY AFFECT YOUR KIDS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Divorcing parents with young children often struggle over who should keep the house in a divorce. Parents typically want to keep the house “for the kids” ... whether they can afford it or not!

Once “the kids” are grown and gone, it’s easy for parents to think that getting rid of the house should be no big deal. After all, with only two people living there, the house may have been too big to keep anyway.

What parents may not realize is that their house was the **family home**. It was where the kids grew up. It is where their memories are – memories that they now may be struggling to hold on to know that everything else is up for grabs.

**What You Can Do:** Be sensitive to your kids’ feelings about **their** house! If you must sell the house for financial reasons, tell them so in advance. Be honest about your finances, and your reason for selling the house. Give them time to grieve the loss of their home. It is a loss to them – and it’s one more loss at a time when they’re already losing a lot. Finally, when you’re dividing up the stuff in the house, make sure to give your kids the chance to take mementos or things that might have sentimental value to them.

## YOUR DIVORCE MAY MAKE YOUR KIDS QUESTION THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIPS.

No one tells parents that if they have spent a lifetime pretending their marriage was happy, their divorce will likely blindside their adult children. When those children discover that their parents have been “living a lie” they will start to wonder if anything is true. For a while (maybe for a long while) they will lose faith in marriage altogether.

Adult children of divorce may also find themselves questioning more than just marriage. They also question their ability to maintain any kind of long term relationship. After all, if their parents’ marriage could fall apart after decades, what kind of relationship could possibly stay together?

Finally, the adult children of divorce who parents are not already themselves may start to question whether they ever want to become parents. If no relationship is permanent, and kids always get hurt, why bother having kids in the first place?

**What You Can Do:** Look past your own pain long enough to recognize if your kids’ relationships are suddenly starting to struggle. Differentiate your mistakes from theirs. Encourage them to get therapy to deal with the emotions they are feeling and the questions they are having. While you’re at it, get therapy for yourself as you grapple with the same big life questions that your kids are now facing.

## YOUR DIVORCE REWRITES HISTORY.

When parents of young children divorce, the kids usually still have plenty of time together with each parent to adjust. They make new memories, new family traditions. They have their history of being one family and their history of being two families. For adult children, the only history they have as a family is in the past. Now, that history seems like it was resting on a lie.

When their parents' long-term marriages fall apart, adult children often feel the ground beneath them start to give way. Suddenly, they find themselves questioning whether they can believe in anything. They also start looking back at what seemed to be happy childhood memories and wondering if they, too, were "fake."

After all, if their parents weren't happy when they seemed to be happy, then maybe everything that made memories that seemed happy was just a lie, too.

**What You Can Do:** Again, be sensitive to how your kids are feeling. Do your best to reassure them that, just because you're getting divorced now, doesn't mean that your entire history was miserable or made-up. (Unless, of course, it was. In that case you have some heavy duty explaining to do.) It will also help if you don't burden your kids with countless stories about how horrible your spouse was to you for decades. That only reinforces their belief that their whole family life was based on a lie.

## HOLIDAYS WILL NEVER BE THE SAME.

Okay. You think you figured this one out already. Obviously, you know that you, your spouse, and your kids are not going to be sharing Norman Rockwell moments during future holidays. But, are you sure you really thought about what that means?

If your kids are married themselves, they already have two sets of parents' homes to visit during the holidays. Unless you and your ex are willing to put aside your differences and go to holiday events together, your kids will now have three sets of parents to visit. If your kid's spouse's parents are divorced, they will have four sets of parents to visit.

Putting aside the question of just how many dinners you can eat in one day, expecting that you will spend every holiday with your kids may just not be realistic. What's more, since there are no court ordered holiday schedules for adult children, you and your ex may be vying for time with your kids during the holidays. That will make your kids feel guilty and put even more stress on them during an already stressful time.

**What You Can Do:** Be realistic about the holidays! Know in advance that everything is going to be different and plan accordingly. As hard as it is, you may want to arrange to celebrate the holiday on a different day than usual. Then purposely plan your own vacation on a cruise ship

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on the actual holiday, just so you spare your kids the drama of trying to please multiple sets of parents all at the same time. (Again, it's about sucking it up and being the parent!)

## YOU OWE IT TO YOUR KIDS TO MAKE SURE BOTH YOU AND YOUR EX ARE FINANCIALLY SOLVENT

The temptation in any divorce is to be overly concerned about your own financial security, while not caring at all about your ex. That's normal. After all, you're getting a divorce. You no longer must worry about your ex, right?

Wrong! If you are over 50, and you have kids, caring only about your own finances can potentially put a tremendous burden on your kids.

Think about it: do you really expect your kids to let you or your spouse eat cat food or live in a homeless shelter when you're 70? (Hopefully the answer to that is: No!) So, if your divorce judgment leaves your spouse with nothing, who do you think is going to pick up the slack? If you burn through your entire retirement account paying for divorce lawyers, what is your future, and your kids' future, going to look like?

**What You Can Do:** Don't spend all your money fighting over your divorce! Yes, it may suck to be getting a divorce at your age. But it will suck worse to be broke and divorced at your age! Do your best to resolve your divorce amicably. Also, try to divide up your income and assets in a way that leaves both you and your spouse reasonably okay. If money is tight, and you're unemployed, get a job! If you don't have enough money to retire, keep working! In short, be reasonable, be fair, and be financially responsible.

## ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE NEED PARENTS TOO

Dealing with adult children of divorce may be different than dealing with young children in a divorce. Yet, the same basic principles apply.

- Keep your children's best interests in mind, even if your children are adults;
- Be sensitive to your children's needs;
- Know that your children need time to adjust to your divorce, just as you do;
- Give your children the time and space to grieve;
- Don't burden your kids with ugly information about your spouse; and
- Don't use your kids as a therapist.

In short, no matter who you are, or how old you are, if you're a divorcing parent, you've still got to think about your kids.

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You've still got to be the parent.

No matter how old your children are, when you are facing divorce being prepared is key. Get your **FREE Divorce Checklist** to make sure you are ready for what's coming. Visit her website to download the free divorce checklist.

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