

CHECKLIST FOR DIVORCING AND DIVORCED PARENTS

1. As soon as possible, inform the school of a separation or divorce so that school personnel can be made aware of your child's needs.
2. Clarify whether or not you wish information about the family situation to be disseminated to teachers. Make it clear that while you wish school personnel to be on the lookout for problems, you do not want teachers to look for problems or treat your child differently.
3. Ask to be contacted if a teacher observes any changes in behavior or any problems.
4. If your child is in elementary school, you may want to discuss options for classroom placement, stressing the personal qualities of the teacher in meeting your child's specific needs.
5. If a teacher reports behavior such as bullying, attention seeking, stealing, regression, restlessness, daydreaming, or fantasizing, remember that these behaviors often represent attempts by the child to cope with and master psychological pain. Try to see these behaviors as ways you can be of help (or, if the behavior(s) continues too long, seek other help for your child).
6. Cutting and truancy are common signs of distress to which school personnel may alert you. Facing normal everyday expectations is sometimes very difficult for children under stress. Work with your child and the school counselor to confront and solve the problem. Know that options exist (e.g. weekly academic progress reports, daily attendance checks, etc.) within the framework of the school structure to provide you with information and your child with extra support during this period of adjustment.
7. Reading can often ease the burden of painful feelings as well as provide healthy strategies for coping with a crisis. Reading a book with your child can provide an excellent opportunity for discussions. The librarian in your child's school or at the public library can suggest appropriate books.
8. The non-custodial parent has the right to be informed of his or her child's progress in school, unless a court order prohibits release of this information. According to the research, having two interested parents seems to improve a child's school achievement as well as general adjustment.
9. While school personnel can provide helpful objective information to both parents, they also worry about becoming "middlemen" in situations where communication between ex-spouses is poor. For school personnel to be most effective, try to keep them out of the middle.

Adapted from *Helping Children of Divorce: A Handbook for Parents & Teachers*. Scnocken Books, NY, 1985.