



Seven Myths about the Effect of Divorce on Adult Children

Most people know that divorce has a huge impact on minor children, but not everyone realizes that adult children are also significantly affected. Here are six common myths about the effects of divorce on adult children:

1. Adult children won't be affected financially. Not true. Many adults today aren't self-sufficient and rely on their parents into their late 20's and early 30's. A divorce may affect their parents' ability to help them financially through college and while getting settled into an occupation/career. The separation of assets also means that any family assets that may have been available for them later through inheritance will most likely be spent. In addition, they may now have one or both parents who won't be financially stable who may need financial help from their children at some point.

2. Adult children won't be put in the middle. To the contrary, many divorcing parents tell their children all the divorce details assuming that their adult children will understand the marital problems and even be able to offer advice and support and many blatantly attempt to get the children to side with them against the other spouse. Parents often disclose information to their children that creates a dilemma for the adult child. Hearing shortcomings about your parent even if they are only manifested in the marriage makes you question the character of your parent. Telling an adult child negative things about one of their parents puts them in the difficult position of appearing to condone the behavior by continuing to have a relationship with that person. The pressure to side with one parent over the other comes from the parents and from the internal conflict the adult child feels over the choices the parent is making.

3. Adult children won't have many adjustments. The adjustments for adult children will actually be significant and stressful. They are already handling adult responsibilities that may include a family, children, job, bills, college, and/or busy schedule. When you add on the additional demands to keep up with both parents and their separate lives, stress will be added. The adjustments of having to combine holiday and other events with parents who may not want to be together at the events, the strain that will be felt by all, and needing to see each parent separately to maintain a relationship is a huge adjustment and puts demands on time.

4. Adult children won't feel responsible. Young children often blame themselves for their parents' divorce. Adult children also feel responsible for their parents but in different ways. You

don't worry about your mom when she is with your dad and your dad when your mom is taking care of him, but you do worry about each when they are alone. When they know a parent is hurting emotionally, they will feel a need to emotionally support and comfort the parent. They will feel responsible to spend more time with a parent who feels alone and has too much empty time to fill. If one or both parents are struggling financially due to the break up, the adult child will struggle with whether or not to help financially. They may even have to deal with a parent needing to move into their home. They may feel that it is their responsibility to confront the parent that is causing the divorce or be a mediator to try to get the parents back together.

5. Adult children won't feel the loss of a family. Not true, adult children suffer a huge loss. Divorce shatters one's sense of family. It robs them of a past, especially if they learn their parents have had problems all along but stayed together for the children and what they believed to be true about their family isn't true. Even when adult children live away from home, it is a comfort to know they have a home they can come back to. Family provides security, a sense of belonging, a common identity and a shared history. What was once one family is now two and the loss of the intact single family unit is destabilizing. Adult children will go through the grief cycle that will include stages of denial, anger, blame, and sadness. They may also struggle with personal betrayal and abandonment by the parent who is initiating the divorce.

6. Adult children won't be angry. Adult children do feel a huge amount of anger and may blame one parent more than the other and even refuse to have a relationship with one of the parents. Anger is a normal response to perceived injustice. Adult children have strong opinions about who is at fault and may not be able to see the whole picture, especially if they don't know everything that led to the divorce.

7. Adult children won't be affected spiritually. This is also not true. They may have a spiritual crisis that includes questioning their faith. They may question their parents' beliefs having been raised in a Christian home with a faith that doesn't support divorce and the parents are divorcing. They may question God's ability and willingness to answer prayer when he hasn't intervened and saved the parents' marriage. They may even feel less secure in their own marriages or in the institution of marriage, since their parents couldn't stay together.

You need to understand these seven myths about how adult children are affected by divorce so you can respond appropriately to your adult children and support them through this difficult family adjustment.