

# When College Students' Parents Divorce

## Understanding the issues and the emotions

**D**ivorce is a difficult thing for any person to go through. Many people think about children whose parents are divorcing – but what if the children are adults themselves? Regardless of age, the divorce of one's parents is emotionally draining and very upsetting.

### Situations College-Aged Children of Divorce May Face

Students in the throes of their parents' divorce may be contending with the following situations:

- **The Lost Idea of Home.** Being able to “go back home” is an anchor for many college students. When parents divorce or separate, that home is completely changed (be it the idea of home or an actual relocation of one or both parents), and a sense of not belonging anywhere can weigh heavily on these students.
- **Anger and Resentment.** Adult children of divorce may feel resentment that they have to deal with a major family issue at a time when the next chapter of their own life is supposed to be starting. Anger at one or both parents for “inflicting” this situation can eat away at students if they don't get help dealing with these emotions.
- **Guilt.** If parents decide to divorce once their child has left for college, it's easy for that student to question “Did they stay together this whole time just for me (us)?” This can lead to great feelings of guilt.
- **Stuck in the Middle.** Unfortunately, divorcing couples with adult children often feel the need to use those children as mediators or confidantes. This puts a lot of unnecessary strain on the children, as it thrusts them into the middle of a situation they may want to be as far away from as possible.



- **Negative Conversations.** Adults are more likely to be able to see the faults of their parents now than they would if they were young. This is especially painful when a parent uses their child to vent emotions about their spouse. There are certain lights that a child never wants to see their parent in, and when parents are divorcing the conversations can be overwhelmingly negative.
- **Financial Concerns.** What does a parental split mean in terms of tuition payments? A job? Financial aid? Summer internship or study abroad plans? Students may have to take on more financial burdens when their parents divorce and the impacts can be difficult to handle.
- **Stages of Grief.** Mourning the loss of the family they once knew is very natural for adult children of divorce. Holidays will change, family dynamics will change, communication structures will change... that's a lot of change to adjust to.
- **Stress Surrounding Important Milestones Like Graduation.** Students may have to try to act as peacemakers for their parents, both of whom probably want to attend an event like graduation but who may not want to see each other. The student will probably worry about things like where the parents will sit, how they will split their time between each parent, and whether a fight will break out during what is supposed to be a happy occasion. Facing parental divorce can be lonely, confusing, infuriating and sad, especially when it happens during a student's time away at school. It can feel like the world as they knew it is shifting below their feet. You can help your student start dealing with the issues by encouraging her to see a campus counselor for further assistance. It's the first step in helping her get back on solid ground.

Sources: <http://divorcesupport.about.com/cs/youreok/a/acodadultchild.htm>;  
<http://divorcesupport.about.com/cs/youreok/a/blacod4.htm>;  
<http://divorcesupport.about.com/od/youreok/a/acodhelping.htm>