



FAMILY RENEWAL RESOURCES PROJECT
parenting forever, through whatever

Family Renewal Resources Project
For separating and changed families

Adolescence: The Majority of children of divorce live through their adolescence in the post-divorce family.

- At the time of my family separation the children were 12, 16, and 19. The two oldest children were adopted at birth (two months). I mention this only because it added perhaps an extra layer of failure. In addition at the time of separation I had taught 21 years of secondary school and coached boys' and girls' varsity basketball for most of those years. I used to say that no one spent more time with adolescents.
- I mention this for it is important to understand your current relationship with each child for it is now potentially at risk. This assessment will provide a roadmap for future building blocks. In the intact family this assessment seems unnecessary except in a crisis. The crisis is now here, even if you believe otherwise.
- It is safe to say that adolescence in an intact family is a difficult passage in the best of times. As such it is important to find a place where the focus is not on blaming everything that goes wrong in our teen's behavior on our separation and the behavior of their other parent.
- In the section **on parenting** there are many tools set out to navigate the early stage on how to separate. *The way you separate will influence the challenges that your family may face.*
- The different forces at work are important in understanding your teen; more importantly it helps you to understand your new, complicated parenting role. It is the now and future that is important.
- A separation at a time of adolescent children is a unique and high risk challenge for each parent-child relationship.
- I would say that for all my experience with young people I could have lost my relationship with each child along the way. Estrangement was mostly short-term-even though it brought on the '**great fear**' of every separating parent i.e. losing the relationship with your child on a daily basis.
- In an ideal world each child would continue to have a loving and supportive relationship with each parent and their lives would continue to have all the supportive family relationships prior to the breakdown,
- ***The above is the mission of FRRP.***

The majority of children of divorce enter and live through their adolescence in the post-divorce family. This is a critical fact for every parent.

- Children, infant to late adolescence all go through adolescence and the family renewal or failure to do so impacts each child. Chaos at age 7 creates significant likelihood for chaos in adolescence- often a time for teen struggles.
- There are some general research findings that suggest some common outcomes. It does not mean all adolescent children go through each outcome.
- Children of divorce enter adolescence earlier than children of intact families.
- They persist in adolescent behaviour longer than their peers. Some teenagers go through volatile times with every significant person in their lives.
- It is a period of moral and intellectual growth.
- As 'unpredictable' a teenager appears, they have a new capacity to think, question, formulate their opinions, care, love and push away.
- Approach this with a sense that the teenager is full of potential and that they'll get through it and it'll be much easier.
- Even in the best parent-child relationship (open), a parent often finds their adolescent has a different perspective on what has taken place in the family journey.
- The divorce makes them think about why it happened, who was responsible, other family relationships, etc.
- They feel the need to think about the right and wrong in human relationships and whether they can avoid taking the turn you did or not.
- Teenagers' concerns are more urgent and demanding re: what they want in their futures and what they want to achieve.
- Teenagers believe they know what happened because they were in the home when the breakdown played out. Even younger children approach adolescence with a learned viewpoint of what took place or possible responsibility or blame for one parent's unhappiness, etc.
- Many adolescents have likely witnessed new, intimate relationships in their parents' lives and thus their own lives. This is occurring at a time of relationship building and experimentation in their own lives.
- Less structure and discipline at home pull them into adolescence earlier.
- Children of divorce are less supervised. Teenagers with less supervision take advantage of this fact.
- Risky behavior for teens is common enough in the intact family; in a separated family where everyone may be trying to build a separate home and to find intimacy, a child's risky behaviors can be missed, overlooked, or simply ignored.
- I like to suggest that parents need to reflect on their own adolescence- in an intact or separated family. I think doing adequate soul searching may help you to employ the best tools in your parenting toolbox. It is important to employ tools that are about helping your teen navigate challenges that are going to be in their future again and again.
- Be vigilant without being ultra-suspicious.
- Don't give your youngest the impression that you anticipate trouble.

- Stay in touch with teens, express interest in their lives.
- State values clearly to avoid your teens getting in trouble.
- Remember that your child's judgement is seriously flawed by adolescent impulsiveness.
- Be able to establish between normal behaviour and harmful acting out. You can't do so unless you're connected to your children.
- The role of a step parent does not have the same responsibilities or authority as the biological parent. You are encouraged to read our section and articles on Blended families. Teens make life very complicated for many blended families.
- Adolescents soon realize that if they act out and do something wrong, a parent who is fully occupied in a second marriage will come running.
- Many ask to change their residency during adolescence. If you follow through, be sure you and your ex plan the move carefully. My two youngest teens each changed residence. Neither was done in the way suggested below.
- If your child moves in with the father, make plans that include all parties, with certain conditions attached.
- Don't carry disappointing news.
- If your child plays blow-up games, you and your ex must talk frequently, not just when the blow-up happens.
- Some children feel like unwelcome intruders and will show up on the parent's doorstep 10 years after the divorce. You and your new partner should be prepared for this possibility.
- Setting new rules re: concerning grades, curfew, etc. is difficult to do. Normal parenting (?), if such exists, often is difficult to implement at the time of transition. It can be complicated if the parent is dating or the arrival of a new teen on a more permanent home is going to create havoc in the new home.- havoc is not the teen's fault- it just is the situation. Just try your best and stay CALM! Be aware of your new partner's needs!
- You have more influence than you realize.
- What can you do if your child continues to get in trouble?
- There isn't a remedy for every adolescent crisis. Sometimes life must take its course.
- Your child will be secretly impressed by the attention they gather from a family meeting to discuss their behaviour and the crisis.
- If your child seems irrationally angry at you both, it may stem from earlier on.
- The sense of childhood abandonment may be difficult to reverse.
- In the recommended readings there is a wonderful essay (After My Parents Separated) that captures the journey for many children.
- **The following bullets provide some thoughts re: parenting adolescents.** (Judith Wallerstein: What about the Kids)
- The development of a child's conscience is helped by having a parent who has standards of right and wrong.
- When they pretend not to hear, they were probably listening.
- You don't want your daughter to feel less respect for herself and her body.
- Explain that sex within a loving, caring relationship is completely different than sex with strangers.

- All mothers feel guilt when over the divorce or new marriage whenever there is trouble with the child.
- Hold onto your moral positions, concern for your daughter's self-respect, and insist she follows your rules. You are the one that goes face to face with your child no matter how many times it takes for them to hear you and really listen.
- Stay on top of what's happening in your child's life.
- Establish rules of conduct in your household but also provide privileges that your child can earn by showing responsibility and grown-up behaviour.
- Suggest outings and adventures rather than hanging out or seeing a movie.
- Powerful voices from the street call to your children from countless sources.
- Be vigilant about homework, parties, what clothes they wear, etc.
- Children from divorced families have sometimes never heard of a "curfew".
- The stakes for your child are high, so counter the feelings and thoughts with this understanding.
- Your child is not your sister, brother, or friend. Treat your ex like a comrade in arms.
- Still hold your own morals.
- There are always some hair-raising moments you don't tell your parents about.
- It's impossible to prepare for adulthood without adolescence.
- Some children go through adolescence without taking risks.
- Keep things in perspective and hold your sense of humour.

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