



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

The Impact of Divorce on Child Well-Being

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Webinar
October 22, 2008 ✧ 12:30 pm-2:00pm (EDT)

Presenters:

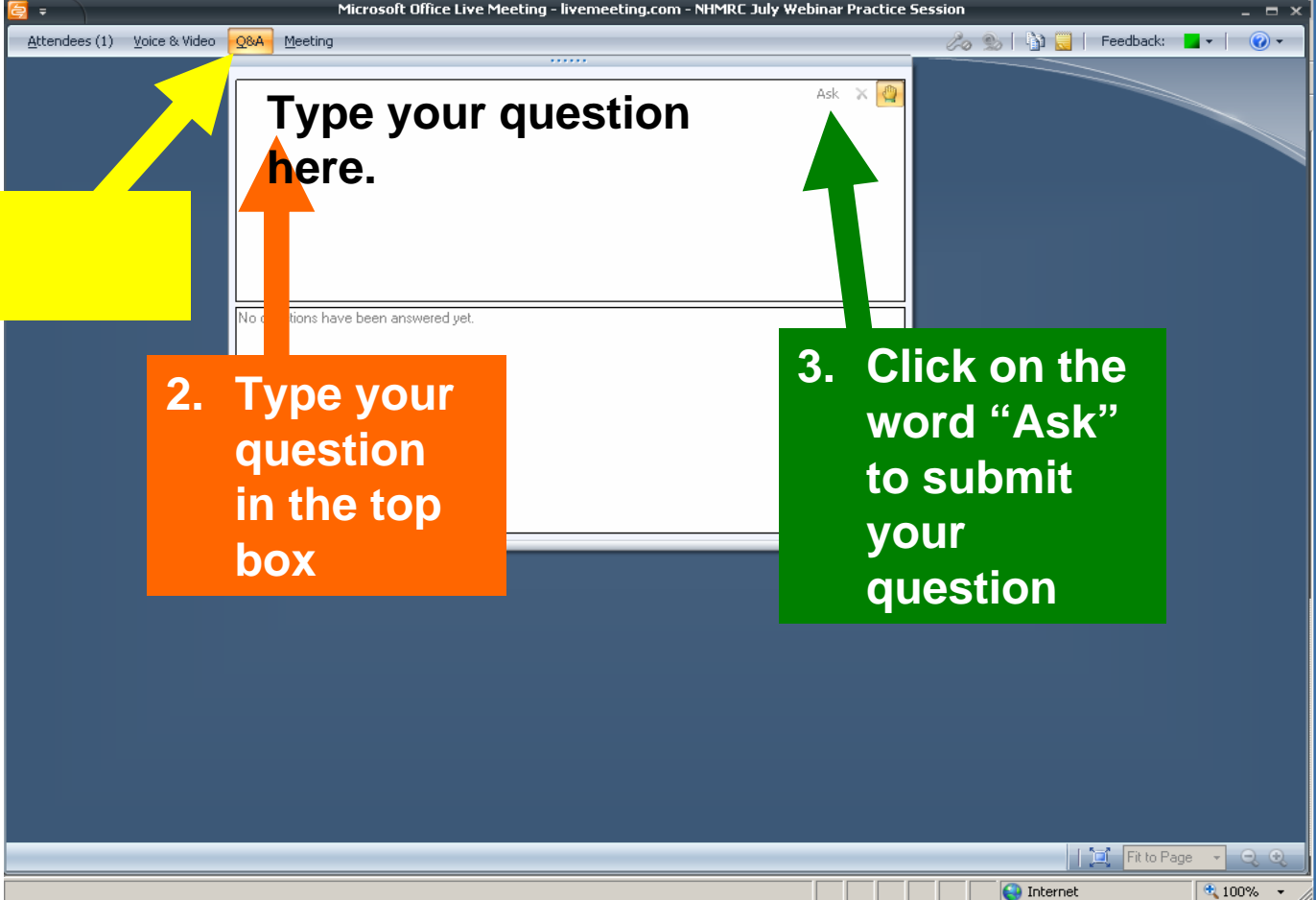
Patrick Patterson, National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

Paul Amato, Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University

Robin Deutsch, Ph.D., Massachusetts General Hospital and
Harvard Medical School



How to Ask a Question...



The screenshot shows the Microsoft Office Live Meeting interface with the Q&A tab selected. The title bar reads "Microsoft Office Live Meeting - livemeeting.com - NHMRC July Webinar Practice Session". The Q&A section has a tab labeled "Q&A" and a "Meeting" tab. Below the tabs is a text input area with the placeholder text "Type your question here." and an "Ask" button. A yellow arrow points to the "Q&A" tab. An orange arrow points to the text input area. A green arrow points to the "Ask" button. A yellow box is on the left, and an orange box and a green box contain numbered instructions.

2. Type your question in the top box

3. Click on the word "Ask" to submit your question



Learning Objectives

- **To provide the latest findings from research on how divorce affects child well-being.**
- **To learn and discuss the impact of divorce on parents.**
- **To provide information on the differing outcomes of divorce on children from low-conflict and high-conflict homes.**



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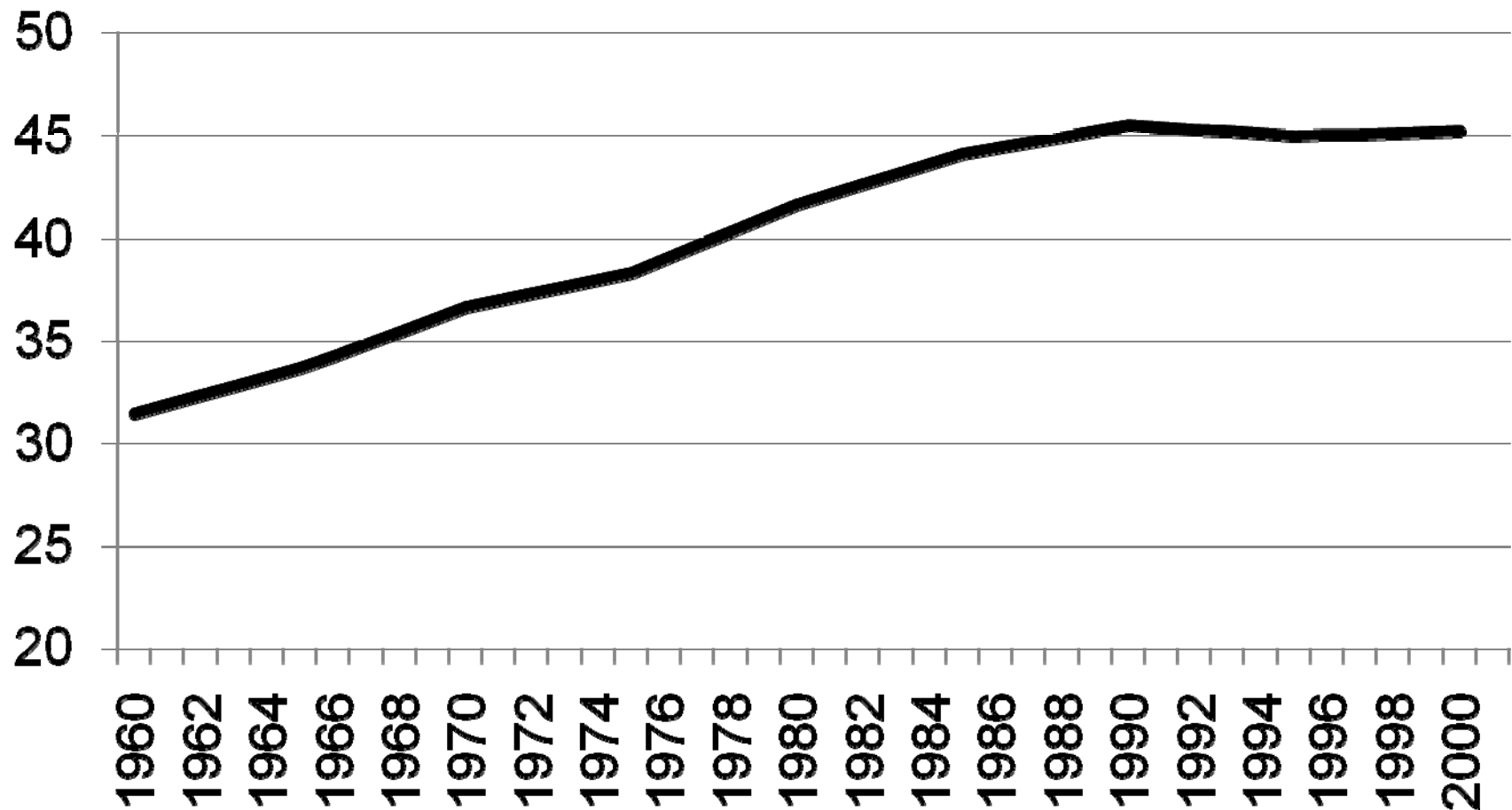
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Divorce and Children's Well-Being

Paul R. Amato

Department of Sociology
Pennsylvania State University

Percentage of Marriages Ending in Divorce



Divorce is Linked with Negative Outcomes among Children

- *externalizing problems*
- *internalizing problems*
- *low self-esteem*
- *academic problems*
- *problems with peer relations*

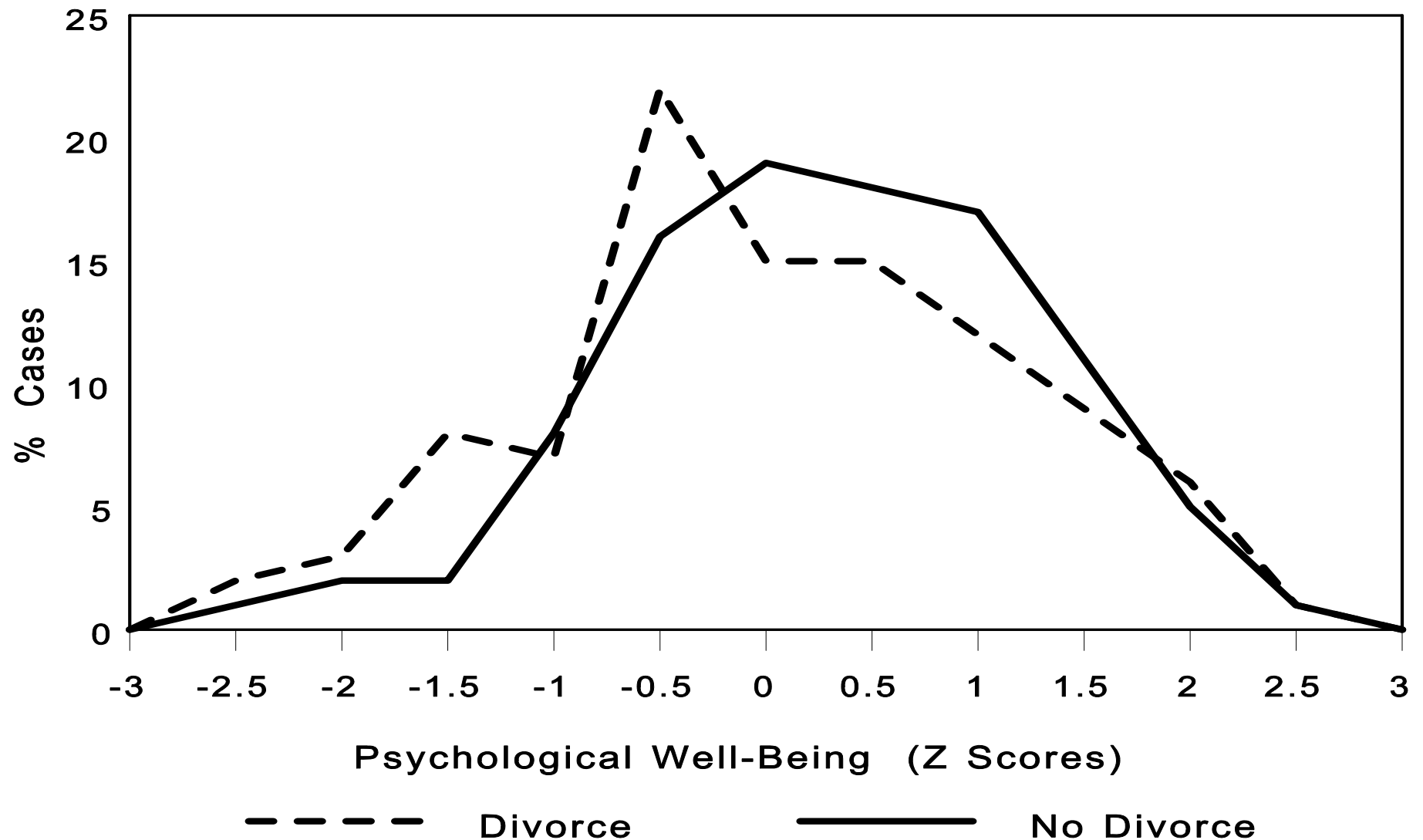
Divorce is Linked with Negative Outcomes among Adult Offspring

- *less education*
- *lower income and job status*
- *increased risk of depression*
- *increased risk of marital conflict and divorce*
- *weak long-term bonds with parents*

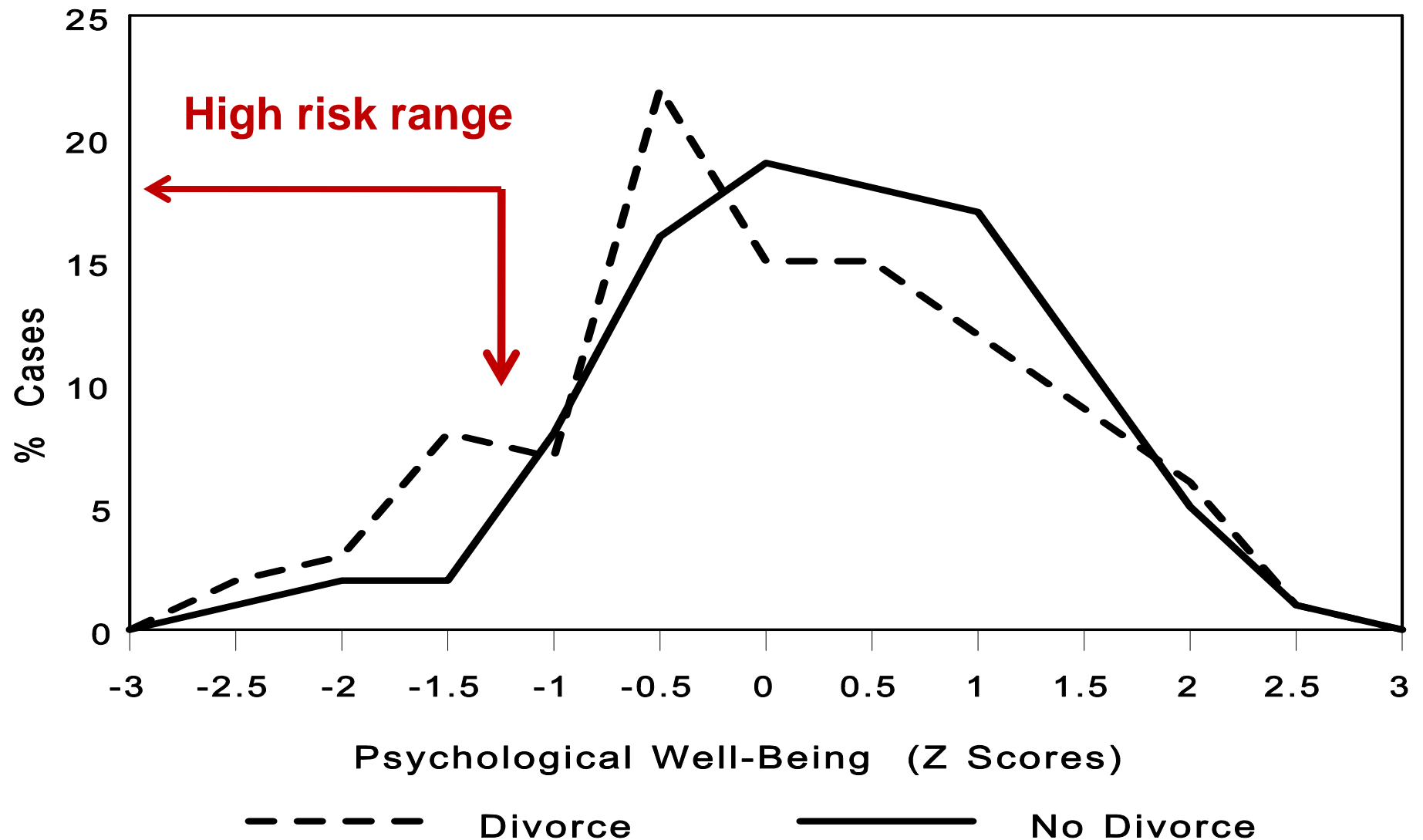
Are All Children Affected Similarly?

- *Some children exhibit lifelong increases in serious problems*
- *Some children show only minor, short-term distress*
- *Some children are better off following divorce if their parents had an overtly hostile relationship*

Distributions of Psychological Well-Being for Offspring with Divorced and Married Parents



Distributions of Psychological Well-Being for Offspring with Divorced and Married Parents



How Does Divorce Lower Children's Well-Being?

- *Economic hardship*
- *Poor parenting*
- *Feeling caught in the middle*
- *Multiple stressful transitions*
- *Interactions with genetic risk*

What Helps?

- *Economic security*
- *Competent (authoritative) parenting from both parents*
- *Cooperative co-parenting*
- *Stability*
- *Parent-child communication*
- *Social support for children*

What Can Practitioners Do?

- *Encourage parents to talk with children*
- *Teach parents to separate their distress from child-rearing practices*
- *Help parents to engage in cooperative coparenting*
- *Assist children in garnering social support*

The Effects of Divorce on Children

Robin M. Deutsch, Ph.D.

Children and the Law Program

Massachusetts General Hospital

Factors that harm children:

- Diminished parenting after divorce
- Being in the middle

Diminished parenting after divorce

- Conflict between parents associated with poorer parenting
- Parents more preoccupied with own life and changes after divorce
- Parent looks to child for support and companionship

Diminished Parenting after divorce

- Compared to married parents divorced parents more prone to depression, alcoholism, drug abuse, psychosomatic complaints
- Mothers less warm, more rejecting, use harsher discipline
- Fathers withdraw more from and engage in more difficult interactions with children

Children caught in the Middle

- Exposure to anger and rage toward other parent is damaging to children
- Having child carry hostile messages, asking intrusive questions, creating a need for secrets place children in the middle

Planning the divorce: what do children need

Initial Separation Stress

- First year or two most stressful time
- Adequate preparation and information reduces isolation and confusion
- Ongoing contact with leaving parent important
- Predictability regarding new schedules, another home, absences from other parent

Preparation for Preschoolers

- Tell children together
- Tell children shortly (no more than a few days) before a parent moves
- Let children know that you will always be their mommy and daddy and that you will always be there for them

Preparation for Preschoolers

- Let them know it is not their fault
- Have a room set up in new home with some familiar toys; invite non-moving parent into the new space
- Let children know when they will see the other parent and show them a calendar with days color coded

Preparation for School-aged Children

- Tell them together
- Let them know that this is an adult decision and they had nothing to do with it
- Both parents love them and always will

Preparation for School-aged Children

- Let them know where the other parent will live and show them the house, apt. Ideally other parent will see the new place as well
- Let them know the schedule
- Take them with you to choose sheets for their bed in the other house

Preparation for adolescents

- Ask for their thoughts about a new schedule and consider their input
- Let them know that their personal schedule matters and parents will work with that
- Let them know that as parents you will communicate about any schedule changes, issues

Protective Factors

- Minimal conflict between parents
- Continued love and support from both parents

Protective Factors

- Good relationship with their parents
- Sense that each parent respects the other's relationship with the child and the child does not have to enter and re-enter different compartments because parents are so negative about each other
- Feeling known and understood by both parents

Child adjustment linked to parent adjustment

- Effective parenting mediates impact of divorce
- Effective Parenting style: warm, authoritative discipline, appropriate expectations, involvement, monitoring of activities

Children's adjustment: conclusions from the research

- Divorce creates stressors for children and families
- Divorce is a risk factor for psychological problems among children
- BUT resilience is the normative outcome of divorce for children
- Children still have painful feelings and memories
- Individual differences in children's post-divorce outcome are influenced by post-divorce family life and family process variables



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**Thank you for
participating in our poll.**

The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center is dedicated to helping your marriage education program succeed.

Please email us at info@healthymarriageinfo.org if there are other areas of research you would like the resource center to address in the future.

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Webinars are held the FOURTH Wednesday of each month.

A recording of today's Webinar will be available on the NHMRC Website in 7 to 9 days.

Please visit the website at:

www.healthymarriageinfo.org

Thank you and have a great afternoon!