

DIVORCE REACTION

The divorce rate has risen to over 50%. Students in our schools are dealing with the symptoms of divorce. School counselors can play a vital role in assisting school staff in identifying these students and helping students cope and achieve success in school.

Symptoms

1. Emotional reactions (crying, begging, temper outbursts) around separation or transferring from one home to another
2. Feelings of guilt; belief that they were somehow responsible for the divorce/separation
3. Strong feelings of sadness combined with social withdrawal and academic decline
4. Marked increase in acting out and regressive behaviors (thumb-sucking, bed-wetting)
5. Pseudo maturity by suppressing emotions of divorce and assuming parental roles
6. Psychosomatic complaints in response to sadness, stress or frustration

Cause

1. Parents were divorced or separated

Goals

1. Alleviate fears of abandonment
2. Eliminate feelings of guilt that reflect blame for parents' divorce/separation
3. Elevate and stabilize mood.
4. Decrease acting out and regressive behaviors
5. Eliminate psychosomatic complaints
6. Behave at age-appropriate level

How to Help

1. Encourage the student to express their feelings associated with the separation/divorce
2. Develop a time-line of student's significant developments or changes in their life
3. Explore factors contributing to student's feeling of guilt about the separation/divorce
4. Encourage parents to give their child an allotted time of undivided attention each day
5. Assist parents in establishing a routine of positive activities for the student

6. Explore with student the pleasurable activities that could be pursued
7. Demonstrate genuine interest and positive regard to promote self-esteem
8. Use art, play or role-plays to help the student express their feelings about the divorce
9. Identify common problems associated with divorce/separation
10. Place student in separated family group
11. Discuss positive ways family and friends can help in adjustment