

## Research Findings on Children's Post-divorce Adjustment

By

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Attorneys and divorcing parents often contact us with very specific questions about children's post-divorce adjustment. We have compiled the following list of research-based findings that answer many of these questions.

The primary residential parent's mental health is an important factor influencing children's post-divorce adjustment. Children, whose primary residential parent has a serious mental health, drug or alcohol problem, or personality disorder, show poorer adjustment than children whose parent is well-adjusted and functions effectively in most areas of life.

Children younger than two years of age are unable to understand the reason for separation from a parent. Frequent contact is required to form and maintain a meaningful attachment.

Children younger than two or three years old lack the language and cognitive skills necessary to maintain a long-distance relationship with the non-resident parent.

In post-divorce situations characterized by low conflict, frequent visits with the non-resident parent are associated with better child adjustment; conversely, in situations where conflict remains high, frequent visits with the non-resident parent are associated with poor adjustment.

The conflict most harmful to children involves repeated exposure to parental verbal aggression and/or physical violence that continue at intense levels for extended periods, between parents with serious psychological problems or character disorders.

Unresolved anger has been shown to impair mother's willingness to assist relationships between their children and former spouses, resulting in fewer visits, including overnights, three years after divorce. Also, unresolved maternal anger has been connected with undermining visits between children and their fathers.

Active and appropriate parenting by the residential and non-resident parent enhances children's well-being in the long term.

College students that experienced frequent contact in childhood with their fathers reported stronger feelings of closeness to this parent, and they received more emotional and financial support from their fathers.

Non-resident fathers are more likely to consistently pay child support when they have regular contact with their children.

Children's well-being is related to spending holidays with the non-resident parent and participating in a wide range of activities with that parent.

The relationship between the non-resident parent and child is more positive when they have frequent and longer visits, live close to each other, participate in a wide variety of activities together, and spend holidays together.

References:

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3. Otto, R.K., Buffington-Vollum, J.K., & Edens, J.F. (2003). Child custody evaluation. In Alan M. Goldstein (Ed.), *Handbook of Psychology*, Volume 11, Forensic Psychology (pp. 179-208) Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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