



## ***Introduction***

Divorce often creates dramatic changes for a family. While it means the end of a marriage, it does not mean the end of your family. Children still need to feel loved and supported by both of their parents.

Bismarck Public Schools recognizes that divorce can have an impact on a child's academic, emotional and social progress. We want to work with you, within reason and within the law, to help minimize these effects of divorce.

## ***Children and Divorce***

Children of divorce may experience grief, sadness, embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, resentment, divided loyalty, and intense anger. They worry about separation from a parent, changes in their routine, or not being picked up from school or cared for at home.

*Ages 2-4:* Preschoolers often become insecure, dependent, and demanding. They may fear the loss of their home or feel responsible for the breakup.

*Ages 5-8:* Students in primary grades may feel abandoned, intensely insecure, and sad. School and social performance may suffer. Conflicts regarding parent loyalty may intensify problems.

*Ages 9-11:* Students in upper elementary grades understand the situation better, but may feel very angry toward the parent they think caused the divorce. They may feel ashamed or have problems with sleeping, health, school, or friends. Self-

blame, depression, and attempts to reunite parents are not uncommon in this age group.

*Ages 12-18:* Adolescents frequently withdraw from family, asserting their independence as a way of coping. Behavior may become more aggressive or antisocial. Anger, anxiety, and acting out behavior are common. They may worry about how the divorce will affect the family financially.

## ***Tips for Divorced Parents***

Repeatedly tell your child that he or she is not responsible for the divorce. Explain what is happening over and over again in simple terms. Reassure the child that things will be OK, just different, and that their needs will still be met.

Try to keep the student in school for the rest of the year, if possible, to maintain a stable environment for the child. Give the child enough time to deal with the separation or move; make changes gradually.

Have consistent rules, schedules, and curfews between both homes.

Please show maturity in front of children and the teacher/school staff.

Avoid putting kids in the middle or requiring them to choose between parents. Communicate directly with each other vs. going through the child.

## ***Main Types of Custody***

*Joint Decision-Making Responsibility:*

This is the most typical custody agreement. Trial courts usually define this arrangement this way:

- Each parent will have the right to obtain medical and school records, and make decisions for the care of the child when they are in the care of that parent.
- As to non-emergency decisions regarding health care, education, and religious training, the parties shall have equal rights and consultation shall be accomplished and a joint decision reached.
  - Each party has the right to be informed by school officials about the child's welfare, educational progress and status, and to attend school and parent-teacher conferences. The school is not required to hold separate conferences for each party.
  - Each party has the right to reasonable access and telephone contact with the minor child.
  - The parents shall keep each other informed of scheduled educational conferences, school activities, and extracurricular activities.

*Primary Residential Responsibility:*

A child primarily lives with one parent. The other parent usually has visitation rights, which entitles him/her to school information, report cards, etc. unless otherwise stated in divorce documents.

*Termination of Parental Rights:*

A parent's legal rights to the child are terminated, so the parent has no access to the child or records/information.

## ***Resources***

A school counselor and/or school social worker can help you and your children through this change or refer you to an outside agency for assistance.