Helping kids with divorce

By DIANA L. SKAGGS
Special to The Courier-Journal

AS DIFFICULT as divorce is for the more than 1 million American couples who dissolve their marriages each year, for their children, it can be even worse. It is not enough to assume that children are resilient and will bounce back, even though many adults may find their post-divorce lives much better.

A Princeton University study showed that children who live apart from one parent are more likely to drop out of school and have a child before reaching 20. Many other studies have concluded that children whose parents are divorcing suffer from depression, poor academic performance, and trouble entering into committed relationships of their own. Approximately one-third of the children of divorce lose contact with one parent. The longer parental conflict continues, the more serious the psychological damage to the child.

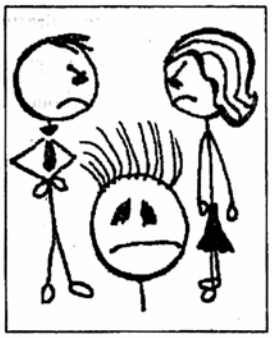
> Many studies conclude that "children whose parents are divorcing suffer from depression, poor academic performance. . . ."

Ann Landers recently published portions of a brochure published by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, "Stepping Back from Anger: Protecting Your Children from Divorce." The text of this excellent article is available in its entirety at the Academy's website (www.aaml.org).

There are several excellent books available to help both parents and children lessen the damage.

Several fine books are suitable for preschool through third grade-age children: "Dinosaurs Divorce" by Marc Brown and Lawrence Brown (Little, Brown); "Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore" by Kathy Stinson and illustrated by Nancy Lou Reynolds (Firefly); and "At Daddy's on Saturday" by Linda Walvoord Girard (Albert Whitman & Co.).

For kindergarten through 8th grade, we suggest "How It Feels When Parents Divorce" by Jill Krementz (Knopf); "Divorce Happens to the Nicest Kids" by Michael S. Prokop (Alegra House); and "It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear" by Vicki Lansky (Book Peddlers).



A child's vision of divorce.

The "Kids Book of Divorce" by Eric Rofes, editor (Random House), is an interesting look at how teens view divorce.

"Helping Your Child Survive Divorce" by Dr. Mary Ann Shaw (Carol) provides guidance and advice for parents to help their children cope with issues of divorce.

Parents may also find these books helpful: "The Single Mother's Book" by Joan Anderson (Peachtree); "Families Apart" by Melinda Blau (Perigree); "Mothers on Trial" by Phyllis Chesler (Harcourt Brace); "Dividing the Child" by Eleanor MacCoby and Robert H. Mnookin (Harvard); "101 Ways to be a Long Distance Super-Dad or Mom" by George Newman (R&E Publishers); and "The Custody Revolution" by Richard Warshak (Poseidon).

"The Divorce Handbook" by James T. Friedman (Random House) should be helpful to anyone facing or undergoing divorce, as would be "Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce" by Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee (Houghton Mifflin). Other good books for parents included "Divided Families" by Frank Furstenberg and Andrew J. Cherlin (Harvard); "Growing Up With Divorce" by Neil Kalter (Fawcett); "Vicky Lansky's Divorce Book for Parents" by Vicky Lansky (Book Peddlers); and "Mom's House, Dad's House" by Isolina Ricci (Fireside).

The more divorcing parents read, the more they will learn and understand how critical it is that they step back from anger and do everything they can to act in their children's best interests, and, if necessary, seek professional help for themselves and their children.

The reviewer is an attorney