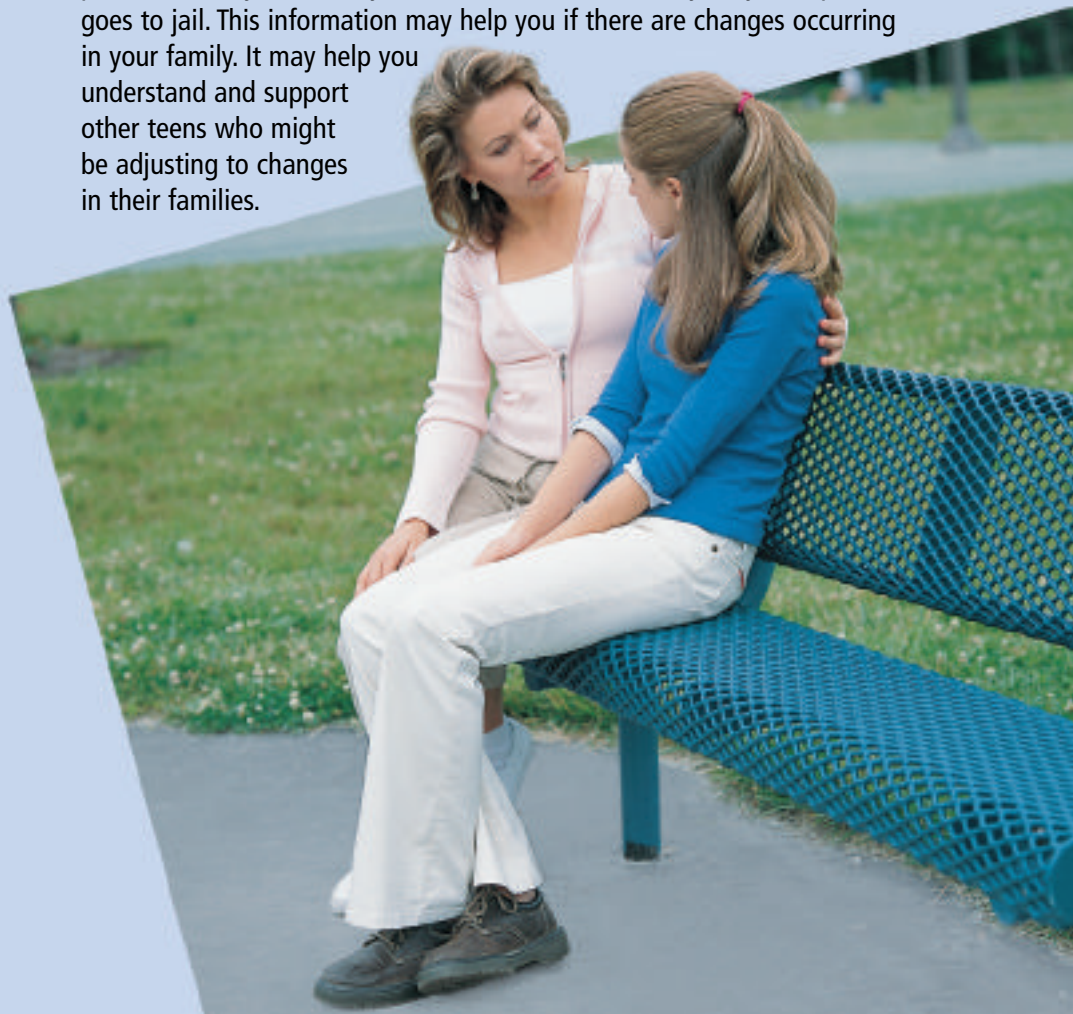


Adjusting to Family Changes

HEALTH GOAL

- I will make healthful adjustments to family changes.

This lesson discusses changes that may occur in family relationships. You will learn ways a teen might adjust if parents get a divorce, a teen lives in a single-custody family, a teen lives in a stepfamily, a parent loses a job, a family member is called to military duty, or a parent goes to jail. This information may help you if there are changes occurring in your family. It may help you understand and support other teens who might be adjusting to changes in their families.



What You'll Learn

1. Evaluate the effects divorce might have on teens and ways teens might adjust. (p. 150)
2. Discuss the effects of a single-custody family and ways teens might adjust. (p. 152)
3. Discuss effects of living in a stepfamily and ways teens might adjust. (p. 153)
4. Discuss having a family member in the military and ways teens might adjust. (p. 154)
5. Evaluate the effects on teens if a parent is in jail and discuss ways teens might adjust. (p. 155)
6. Evaluate the effect of a parent losing a job and ways teens might adjust. (p. 156)

Why It's Important

Understanding family changes helps teens to be resilient and protects physical and emotional health.

Key Terms

- marital separation
- divorce
- dissolution
- custodial parent
- joint custody
- visitation rights
- grandparents' rights
- single-custody family
- stepfamily
- foster care

What Would You Do?

Writing About Family Changes Suppose a friend has a family member called to active military duty. Your friend is unsure when she will be able to talk to her family member. She is afraid for her family member's safety. What are ways that you can show empathy for your friend and help her adjust to this family change? After reading page 154, write a response in your health journal.



Health TEKS covered by Lesson 14: 1H, 8A, 9B, 12A, 12B, 13A, 13D, 13F, 14A, 15A, 15B, 16B

Divorce

In order for marriages to succeed and be satisfying, married partners need to pay attention to the status of their relationship. When a relationship is neglected, the quality of the marriage declines and intimacy is lost. The most common stressors in marriage are changes in financial status, changes in living arrangements, changes in work situations, illness of a family member, abuse, infidelity, poor communication, and alcohol and other drug dependency.

What to Know About Divorce

If parents or stepparents have conflict

A process in which married partners identify their problems, agree upon solutions, and reestablish intimacy is called **marital conflict resolution**. The attitude of each partner is important in marital conflict resolution. In a healthful and caring marriage, each partner is willing to work on problems.

Sometimes, marriage partners need help with marital conflict resolution. They may need assistance identifying their problems or finding solutions. In some cases, one partner is aware of a problem, but the other partner does not recognize the problem. This is often the case in a marriage in which one partner abuses drugs or alcohol. The partner who abuses drugs or alcohol denies that a problem exists.

Outside intervention Outside intervention may be needed to help resolve the problem. A married couple may recognize a problem, but not be able to solve it themselves. A marriage counselor, such as a member of the clergy, psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker, may help present possible solutions. If the solution involves new ways of behaving, the counselor may help assist one or both partners to change their behavior.

What Happens During Divorce

Married couples are not always able to solve problems and reestablish intimacy. About 43 percent of all first marriages end in marital separation and/or divorce. **Marital separation** is a cessation of cohabitation between a married couple by mutual agreement or judicial decree. **Divorce** is a legal way to end a marriage in which a judge or court decides the terms with respect to property, child custody, and spousal support. Most married couples who divorce experience a six-stage process.

Stage one The marriage deteriorates; partners show less affection and begin to detach from one another. Conflict resolution may be tried. The first stage may last up to several years.

Stage two One or both partners seek legal counsel. The different options for ending the marriage are examined. An **annulment** is a legal way to end a marriage when it is decided that the marriage was not legally binding. A **dissolution** is a legal way to end a marriage in which the marriage partners themselves decide the terms with respect to property, custody, and support.



Make the Connection

Stress-Management Skills

For more information on stress-management skills, see page 104 in Lesson 10.

Stage three In the third stage of divorce, issues regarding property and support payments are finalized. The property in a marriage usually refers to the home and household furnishings the couple owns, jewelry, cars, life insurance, money in savings accounts, stocks, and other investments. One partner may agree to pay spousal support to the other. Usually, the partner paying spousal support is the partner who has the greater ability to earn money.

Stage four In the fourth stage of divorce, issues of child custody, visitation rights, and child support are negotiated, and the divorce is finalized. **Single custody** is an arrangement in which one parent keeps legal custody of a child or children. The **custodial parent** is the parent with whom a child or children live and the parent who has the legal right to make decisions about the health and well-being of a child or children. **Joint custody** is an arrangement in which both partners keep legal custody of a child or children. A child or

children may live with one parent or may alternate living arrangements, spending time with one parent and then the other. This arrangement requires that meaningful communication between the parents be maintained after the marriage has ended.

Visitation rights are guidelines set for the visitation of children by the parent who does not have custody. **Grandparents' rights** are the visitation rights with their grandchildren that courts have awarded grandparents when their son's or daughter's marriage ends.

Stage five In the fifth stage of divorce, each of the partners establishes a new identity with family, friends, and coworkers.

Stage six In the sixth stage of divorce, each of the partners makes emotional adjustments to the new lifestyle that results from being divorced. This stage of divorce affects both marriage partners and their children.

Effects of Divorce

The divorce of parents or guardians is a major life change. Recognizing the effects that divorce might have helps teens make adjustments.

Feeling a loss of control At least one of the married partners feels a divorce is for the best. Teens do not have control over the situation.

Spending less time with parents Divorced parents have additional responsibilities and less help in doing them. They may have less time to spend with teens. Any lack of parenting can take its toll on teens.

When Parents Divorce

The following are suggestions for teens whose parents divorce:

- Practice stress-management skills. You have experienced a major life stressor.
- Avoid using alcohol and other drugs.
- Recognize that becoming sexually active will not make you feel better. In most cases, it will make you feel more empty and alone.
- Choose healthful ways to express your anger. Participating in delinquent behavior will make life even more difficult for you.
- Be aware of your feelings of rejection and betrayal. Ask for help from friends, family, or teachers when you need it.

Activity: Using Life Skills

Using Communication Skills: Talking About Family Changes

Family changes can leave you with feelings of anger, sadness, or fear. Talking about your feelings with those involved can help you adjust to the changes and feel more comfortable. Here are some ideas that can help.

1 Identify your feelings. To state your feelings accurately, try to use specific words, such as *threatened, confused, resentful, rejected, embarrassed, or fearful.*

2 Choose the best way to communicate. Use I-statements when you express your feelings. Unlike a "you" message, an I-message does not shame or blame the other person.

3 Express your thoughts and feelings clearly. Send a clear message. Make sure your tone of voice and body language match your spoken words. For example, if you say "I'm okay" but use an angry voice, you are sending a mixed message.

4 Listen to the other person. You also can encourage others to express their feelings by using "door openers," such as "You seem upset about losing your job."

5 Make sure you understand each other. Ask questions or restate what the other person has said. For example, "So you're saying I'll be able to stay at dad's every other weekend. That makes me feel better."



Declining academic performance

Teens may experience a decline in grades during and after the divorce of parents. This usually is attributed to a lack of concentration.

Grieving Teens grieve the end of family life as they knew it. They may experience each of the five stages of grief at some point during the divorce process and after the divorce: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance.

Acting out with harmful behaviors

Some teens respond to the stress of divorce by acting out. These teens are at risk for becoming sexually active, abusing alcohol and other drugs, and developing delinquent behavior.

Resenting parental dating

If parental dating begins before or soon after divorce, teens may feel angry. They may feel that a parent's boyfriend or

girlfriend caused the breakup of the parents' marriage. Some teens continue to hope for the reconciliation of parents for many years. They may be jealous of someone a parent dates.

Having difficulties in relationships

Some teens have feelings of rejection and abandonment that affect their other relationships. For example, female teens may seek an older boyfriend to be a father figure that might now be missing. They are more likely to enter into harmful relationships and not end them. Male teens whose parents divorce may feel awkward in male/female relationships. Some hold back their feelings and have difficulty trusting others.

Having symptoms of anxiety and stress

Teens whose parents divorce might have symptoms of anxiety and stress, including difficulty sleeping, feeling tired, and changes in appetite.

▲ Talking about your feelings with family and friends will help ease the anger, fear, or sadness you may feel due to family changes.



Single-Custody Families



A family in which a child or children live with one parent who has custody is a **single-custody family**. A child or children may have two parents who are active in their lives, but only one parent has custody or legal responsibility for them. A **joint-custody family** is one in which parents share the living arrangements and legal responsibility for their child or children.

How to Adjust to Living in a Single-Custody Family

Make the Connection

Coping with Depression For more information on coping with depression, see page 117 in Lesson 11.

Some teens have lived in a two-parent household and then must adjust to living in a single-custody family. Recognizing the effects of living in a single-custody family can help them adjust more easily.

Change in standard of living In most cases, children raised in a single-custody family live with their mothers. Because women sometimes experience a drop in their standard of living after divorce, children may have a drop in their standard of living, too. In some cases, this puts them at risk for being economically disadvantaged.

This means they may lack some of the resources that other families have available, such as good medical care, clothing, food, and shelter. Children who live with their fathers also may experience economic hardships. Teens can adapt to changes in their standard of living by recognizing the financial pressures on their parents and discussing ways to control expenses.

Change in contact with role models In a two-parent, or joint-custody family,

there is both a male and a female role model. After divorce, some teens have little or no contact with one of their parents. In many cases, it is their father whom they see less often. Unless there are other family members in their lives, these teens may not experience the benefits of having both female and male role models. By talking to their parents about the change and scheduling time to be together, teens can spend more time with their parents. Also, teens can seek adult mentors through such organizations as Big Brothers and Big Sisters to help them adjust to a single-custody family.

Change in amount of parental supervision The single-custody parent may have the sole responsibility for supervising teens. If this parent works outside the home, there is less time for parental supervision of activities and schoolwork. This accounts for the finding that teens whose parents divorce spend less time with parents and are at risk for getting poor grades. Seeking extra help from teachers or a tutor may be helpful.

Mini-Review

1. Explain how a married couple who needs help resolving marital problems might go about finding a counselor.
2. Why might teens experience a drop in their standard of living after their parents divorce?

Stepfamilies



A marriage in which a previously married person marries again is called **remarriage**. A family consisting of the marriage partners, children that one or both of them had previously, and the children that they have by their marriage to one another is a **blended family** or **stepfamily**. Some blended families include joint custody arrangements.

How to Adjust to a Stepfamily

There are many changes when a stepfamily is formed. Recognizing these changes and possible effects can help teens make adjustments.

Change in family rules When a stepfamily is formed, the parent and stepparent must determine what set of rules the children will follow. Often, children have been raised with specific rules that may not be the same as those in the stepfamily. Suppose one set of children in a blended family were raised with very clear guidelines in which consequences were identified for inappropriate behavior. However, the other children in the family had little discipline and were allowed to behave as they pleased. Blending these two sets of children into one framework for discipline requires adjustment.

Changes in budget Decisions about budget in a blended family can be challenging. Parents and stepparents have many decisions to make about how to spend money. The two sets of children may be used to having different guidelines for spending money.

Changes in family relationships Other issues that are important in blended

families arise from the new relationships that are formed. The success of the blended family often depends on how stepsiblings interact. Clear guidelines for interactions are important.

Some teens who live in blended families feel resentment toward their stepparent. They may think that the stepparent does not like them, or that their stepparent does not treat them as they would like to be treated. However, with effective communication and mutual respect they can establish a healthful relationship with their stepparent.

Suggestions for Teens Whose Parents Remarry

The following suggestions will help teens adjust to a blended family:

- Respect the new guidelines for your behavior. You may not like the new rules, but you must obey them.
- Help your family follow a budget. Recognize that your parents have to provide for a larger family.
- Interact in healthful ways with your stepbrothers and stepsisters. Discuss guidelines for behavior when interacting with new siblings.
- Interact in healthful ways with your stepparent. Use effective communication skills and mutual respect to establish a healthful relationship with stepparents.



If a Family Member is Called to Military Duty



Some teens have a family member who is called to military duty. A family member might have a military career with changing tours of duty, or might be in the reserves and be called to duty because of his or her military skill.

How to Adjust if a Family Member is Called to Military Duty

Did You Know?

War Anxiety

Research indicates that constant exposure to war-related news coverage heightens anxiety.

Understanding the possible effects when a family member is called to military duty will help teens make needed adjustments.

Loss of contact with the family member

Family members who are called to military duty may serve in locations where they will not see or talk to their families for an extended period of time. Teens may feel sad and lonely during the family member's absence.

Loss of family income and change in living arrangements.

When he or she was called to duty, the family member may have had another job. There may be a loss of income when the family member leaves. This may require changes in living arrangements.

Fear for the family member's safety

A family member might be called to active duty in a place where there is terrorism, war, or other conflict. A person in the military may not be able to tell family and friends where he or she is, or what he or she is doing. For family members at home, the fear of the unknown can cause symptoms of stress and anxiety.

Symptoms of anxiety and depression

Teens who are worried, fearful, and lonely may have symptoms of anxiety and/or depression. They may experience headaches, stomachaches, sleeplessness, tiredness, and changes in appetite. Also, they may have difficulty concentrating in school.

The following are suggestions for teens who have a family member called to military duty: Keep in touch with the family member by e-mail, telephone, or mail, if possible. Keep a journal of family events to share with the family member. Limit the amount of media coverage of military conflict you watch or read. Get in touch with other military families. This provides a support network for you and your family. Recognize symptoms of anxiety and practice stress-management skills. Share your feelings with family members and allow them to share their feelings with you. Ask for support when you need it. Share concerns with your teacher, guidance counselor, or coach.

If a Parent Goes to Jail

Some teens have a parent or guardian who breaks the law. There may be sudden changes in family life. The police or FBI may come to the home. The parent or guardian may be arrested. There may be a long or short trial, followed by sentencing, and then jail time. This series of events can cause tremendous stress and anxiety for a family.

How to Adjust if a Parent Goes to Jail

When a parent goes to jail, it is especially stressful for teens. Understanding the possible effects can help teens adjust.

Loss of family income and change in living arrangements One of the immediate stressors may be a shortage of money, if the parent or guardian provided income for the family. Legal fees can be very expensive, and must be paid.

The loss of income may result in other changes. The family may have to move to another place or move in with relatives. If the parent or guardian who goes to jail is the only person providing care for a teen, that teen may end up living with other relatives or be placed in foster care. **Foster care** is an arrangement in which an unrelated adult assumes temporary responsibility for a child.

Criticism from society Teens who have a parent or guardian who is sentenced to jail may have to deal with criticism from society. It can be very embarrassing to listen to comments about the criminal behavior of a parent or guardian. Teens who have a parent or guardian in jail must recognize that they are not responsible for what has happened. They do not have to behave in similar ways.

Reduced contact Teens may or may not be permitted to visit the parent or guardian who is in jail. Some teens may be relieved that there is no contact. Often, teens may miss their parent or guardian.

Symptoms of anxiety and depression Teens may be lonely and depressed. They may fear for the safety of their parent or guardian in jail. Fear of the unknown creates additional anxiety. As a result, they may have difficulty concentrating. School performance might decline. They might experience other symptoms, such as sleeplessness, irritability, angry outbursts, tiredness, headaches, stomachaches, and other signs of anxiety and depression.

Did You Know?

Negative Influence

Teens who have a parent or guardian in jail are more at risk for committing a crime themselves.

Suggestions for Teens Who Have a Parent in Jail

Discuss your feelings with another parent or guardian, mentor, or other trusted adult. Teens who have a parent in jail often feel ashamed, angry, confused, betrayed, and anxious.

- Ask questions: Will there be any changes in where I live? Will my family's financial situation change? What kind of contact am I allowed to have with my parent or guardian?
- Do not accept blame for the illegal actions of the parent or guardian. Remember, you did not commit a crime.
- Pledge that you will not engage in illegal behavior.



If a Parent Loses a Job

A teen's parent or guardian can lose his or her job. There are a number of reasons for why this might happen. A company or business might be acquired by another company. A company might downsize, or reduce its number of employees, for economic reasons. A parent or guardian might have poor job performance due to lack of skills or a problem, such as addiction.

How to Adjust If a Parent Loses a Job

When a parent loses a job, it has different effects on family members. Understanding the possible effects helps teens make adjustments.

The parent's feelings The loss of a job can be devastating to a parent or guardian. The parent or guardian who loses the job may become depressed and disappointed. He or she may lose self-confidence and feel embarrassed, or worry that family members and friends will lose respect for him or her. The person may be anxious and worried about how bills will be paid. He or she may need training for another job.

Loss of income A loss of income may require changes in living standards. Some families may experience homelessness due to unemployment. Some families may move in with other family members. For example, a teen may live with grandparents.

Fear of the unknown Teens who have a parent or guardian who has lost a job also may be anxious and worried. They may wonder: "What should I say to my parent or guardian?" "What should I say to other people?" "What changes will this bring about in where and how we live?"

Suggestions for Teens When a Parent Loses a Job

The following suggestions will help ease stress and anxiety if a parent loses his or her job:

- Give your parent emotional support. Remember, you are on the same team. Encourage your parent.
- Discuss what to say to people outside the family. Your parent(s) can offer suggestions. You can discuss which family discussions are private and what information can be shared with others.
- Discuss what changes will occur in the family budget. Recognize that money might be tight. Do not spend money on things you do not need. Perhaps you can contribute money from a part-time job.

Simple things, ▶
such as
helping around
the house
more often,
can make a big
difference for a
parent who is
stressed or
discouraged.



annulment
custodial parent
dissolution
divorce
foster care
grandparents' rights
joint custody
marital conflict
resolution
marital separation
single-custody family
stepfamily
visitation rights

🔑 Key Terms Review

Complete these fill-in-the-blank statements with the lesson Key Terms on the left. Do not write in this book.

- _____ is an arrangement in which both parents keep legal custody of the children.
- A(n) _____ ends a marriage and the marriage partners decide the terms.
- _____ are guidelines set for the visitation of children by the parent who does not have custody.
- A(n) _____ is the parent with whom children live and the parent who has the legal right to make decisions about the children.
- A(n) _____ is a cessation of cohabitation between a married couple.
- _____ is an arrangement in which an unrelated adult assumes temporary responsibility for a child.
- A(n) _____ is a family in which a child or children live with one parent who has custody.
- _____ is a way to end a marriage in which a judge or court decides the terms.
- _____ are the visitation rights courts have awarded grandparents.
- A(n) _____ consists of the marriage partners and their children from previous marriages.

Recalling the Facts

- What are eight ways that the divorce of parents might affect teens?
- What are five suggestions to help teens adjust to divorce?
- What are five suggestions to help teens adjust to living in a single-custody family?
- What are three ways having a stepfamily might affect teens?
- What are some suggestions for teens whose parent loses a job?
- How might a family member being called to military duty affect teens?
- How might a teen adjust if a family member is called to military duty?
- Name four ways having a parent in jail might affect teens.

Critical Thinking

- Why do some teen females who do not have contact or have little contact with their father date older males?
- How can teens find additional support and attention in a single-custody family?
- Why do some teens whose parents get a divorce avoid social relationships?
- How might children and teens in blended families benefit from having new family members?

Activities

Responsible Decision Making

- Write** You have a friend whose parents are going through a difficult divorce. She seems depressed and you suspect that your friend is using alcohol. Write a response to this situation. Refer to the Responsible Decision-Making Model on page 61 for help.

Real-Life Applications

- What do you think are some important questions for teens to ask if their parents are facing a divorce?
- Why do you think illegal drug use puts an adult at risk for losing a job?
- What would be some of your fears if a family member was on active military duty?
- How could you help a friend adjust if his or her parent was sent to jail?

Sharpen Your Life Skills

- Use Communication Skills** Imagine that you are a designer for a greeting card company. Design a greeting card to send to the families of those on active military duty. Refer to page 154 for information on having a family member in the military.

