



Smoothing the transition with books:

A list of some helpful titles for mom, dad and the kids

By Judge Barbara Goiran, New Port Richey

When faced with a new situation, many people turn to books for help and advice. Whether attorney, mediator or magistrate, it is our job to support clients or litigants through the process of dissolution of marriage while providing professional assistance. Sometimes the divorcing family needs more reassurance, tools or strategies for coping than we can offer in a professional context. Therapists refer to the use of books for this purpose as "bibliotherapy". It is important for adults and children going through a stressful and traumatic experience to know they are not alone and to access tools for coping.

Type "divorce" into Amazon.com's search function and you get 180,694 results. Obviously, there is neither sufficient space nor interest to offer any more than a small fraction of the offerings available. After reviewing numerous books with which I am familiar as well as consulting with colleagues and friends who have professional or personal experience with Dissolution of Marriage, I offer this brief list of some books that might provide some assistance to your clients:

Books for Children:

Very young children are best served by using storybooks that utilize characters that are going through similar situations. In this vein, several books are very good and highly recommended:

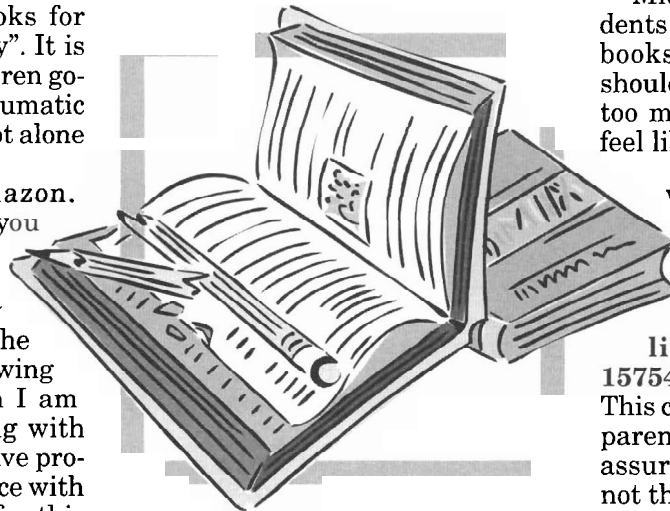
Masurel, C. and MacDonald Denton, K., *Two Homes*. Candlewick Press, (July 14, 2003) ISBN 0763619841

A gentle book for toddlers and preschoolers that assures children that their parents love them and that their world will remain safe and secure even in the midst of great change.

Brown, M. and Krasny, L., *Di-*

nosaur's Divorce. Little, Brown Young Readers, (September 1, 1998) ISBN 0316109963

Published nearly 20 years ago, this book by the creator of the well known character Arthur, uses sympathetic language and endearing characters, and covers a comprehensive range of topics such as why parents sometimes divorce and what will happen to the children.



Lansky, V., *It's Not Your Fault, Koko Bear*. The Book Peddlers, (December 15, 1997) ISBN 0916773477

This book is based on the character Koko Bear's reaction to his parents' divorce. He isn't happy about it! As the bear parents help Koko through the typical range of emotions children often display when faced with divorce, the real parents sharing this book with their kids have help from bullet points with information and advice if their children are reacting to their own situation like Koko Bear.

Boegehold, B., *Daddy Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. NY: Gold Books, 1985

A book about a little girl who turns to her dolls to act out her inner feelings of sadness, anger, guilt and psychosomatic symptoms after her father leaves the family. The book is somewhat weak in

that it is a good overview of the issues facing a child of divorce; the solution is not clearly defined. The child seems to get over her feelings without much help from adults in her life. This book is out of print and hard to find, but it is on many lists of favorite children's books about divorce and it is worth the search.

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Middle to upper elementary students may respond well to more overt books about divorce, but parents should still be cautious to implement too much reading or activities that feel like homework.

Winchester, K, et. al., *What in the World Do You Do When Your Parents Divorce? A Survival Guide for Kids*. Free Spirit Publishing, (June, 2001) ISBN 1575420929

This companion to "The Juggling Act" parents book, the book seeks to reassure children that the divorce is not their fault, that strong emotions, whether sadness or anger, are okay, and that their family will survive this difficult change, albeit in a different way.

Thomas, P., *My Family's Changing*. Barron's Educational Series, (February 1, 1999) ISBN 0764109952

The author of this book is a psychotherapist who deals with basic problems and feelings accompanying divorce. Although the book is listed for early elementary, it is more appropriate for mid-to upper elementary due to its more clinical tone.

Fiction continues to be a useful vehicle for bibliotherapy for middle elementary aged children. Several of these titles are out of print, but are important and well-known fiction books for children and are relatively easy to find:

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**Divorce Book List***from preceding page*

Van Leeuwen, J., *Blue Sky, Butterfly*. Dial, (June 1, 1996) ISBN 0803719728

A simple, beautiful story about a young girl with an older brother and eccentric grandmother who provide emotional support to some extent after the children's father leaves and mother slips into profound depression. The children have to largely fend for themselves and household and schoolwork deteriorate. The mother begins to emerge from her depression by working in her garden and the household gradually returns to a semblance of normalcy. With likeable characters and a message that's not overtly "in your face", this book illustrates how one family deals with divorce.

McGuire, J., *O'Shaughnessey: A Boy and His Leprechaun*. Outskirts Press, (August 22, 2007) ISBN 1432708924

A boy's imaginary leprechaun friend helps him deal with real issues in his life. Great for boys and girls of all ages, the characters are charming and the book appealing.

Christopher, M., *The Comeback Challenge*. Little, Brown Young Readers, (January 2, 1996) ISBN 0316141526

A young readers paperback that weaves soccer action and relationships with teammates and coaches with the protagonist dealing with the emotions surrounding the playing field and his parents' divorce.

Baglio, B., *Pony in a Package* (Animal Ark Series #27). Scholastic, (February 1, 2003) ISBN 043934887

One of a series of "Animal Ark" inexpensive paperback books, the heroine receives a very special gift of a miniature horse, but her parents' recent divorce renders her unable to appreciate it. This is one of many titles that are part of a series. There are several "Babysitters Club" titles that deal with divorce and related issues or the "Amber Brown" character created by author Paula Danziger is

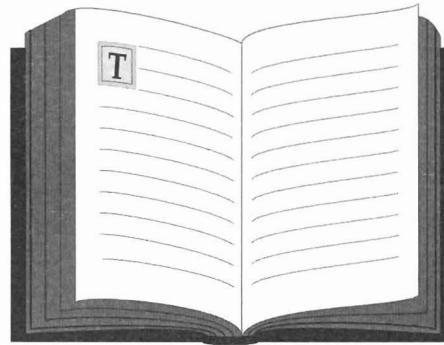
another easily readable paperback series with a child of divorce as a protagonist.

Danziger, P., *The Divorce Express*. Puffin, (June 14, 2007) ISBN 0142407127

The book derives its name for the train that takes the main character, Phoebe, to visitation with her non-custodial parent. The author has been writing young adult fiction for many year and many of her titles are excellent for young girls in particular.

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Teenagers need just as much help and support through their parents divorce as younger children, perhaps more. Even teens of intact families have changing social situations, hor-



mones and maturity issues. Add in a traumatic family change and teens especially need open lines of communication and support from their parents. Teenagers like more contemporary language and ideas, but are not emotionally ready to deal with the difficult internal issues inherent in dissolution of marriage. Parents must be vigilant in dealing with the issues in an age-appropriate fashion.

Stern, Z, et.al., *Divorce is Not the End of the World: Zoe and Evan's Coping Guide for Kids* Tri-cycle Press, (July 1, 1997) ISBN 1883672449

A book by teenage siblings who have gone through their parent's divorce, the authors discuss important topics relating to divorce, respond to letters from other children, and offer tips based on their own personal experiences. Co-authored by their mother, who also gives tips and insights for parents from her perspective.

Schneider, M. and Zuckerberg, J.,

***Difficult Questions Kids Ask and Are Afraid to Ask About Divorce*. Fireside, October 2, 1996. ISBN 0684814366**

Although not geared to children, some older teens might find it helpful to read this book to get the answers to questions they are afraid to ask. Parents should review this book to determine whether it is appropriate and relevant for their particular child, but those children who find it hard to talk might find reassurance and comfort in this book.

Neuman, M. Gary, *Helping Your Kids Cope with Divorce the Sandcastles Way*. Random House, (July 27, 1999) ISBN 0679778012

If the children are willing and the parents think it is appropriate, those living in a circuit that does not require a children's class such as the Sandcastles Program, the children might benefit from a guide and workbook such as that presented by the Sandcastles Program.

The Sandcastles Program is a divorce therapy program to help children cope with divorce geared to the child; this program is mandatory in a dozen counties in the United States and operates in fourteen states, Canada, Mexico, England and South America. Created by Miami Beach Licensed Mental Health Counselor M. Gary Neuman, this is a good home-based program for children that are handling the divorce relatively well but who may benefit from some therapy without the necessity of visiting with a therapist.

Related workbooks available for appropriate age levels.

For those of us who grew up in the "Hello God, it's me, Margaret" era, we know that teens often derive information, education and advice from well-written fiction. Some useful titles in the genre of young adult fiction are as follows:

Prosek, J., *The Day My Mother Left*. Simon & Schuster, (February 27, 2007) ISBN 141690770X

A novel covering several years of a boy's life after his mother leaves.



He deals with the normal feelings and has new issues to resolve when his father remarries. It leaves things somewhat unresolved even after Jeremy's mother comes back into contact with him.

Angell, J., *Yours Truly*, New York: Orchard Books, (1993) ISBN 0531054721

A very good novel about a girl whose parents are separated, the mother has a boyfriend and the father is not around. She has an eight-year-old brother who is apparently adjusting to the separation and accepting of the mother's boyfriend, but the protagonist misses her father greatly. She is forced to adjust not only to the new family situation but also to a move prompted by the divorce, and she runs into trouble with her grade, drinking, getting into trouble, and sexual experiences. She has trouble with her mother and when her father re-enters her life, she idolizes the past and goes to live with him, becoming very protective of him.

All in all, despite her problems, the protagonist is a perceptive and sensitive girl and the weighty issues presented are real and valid for teens that may be going through the same issues, or friends of teens who might be dealing with divorce. The breakup is caused in part by the father's drug use, and the issue of the new partner is also present. Highly recommended but may be hard to find, as it is out of print.

Books on divorce geared to adults can also be incredibly value to help children and teens through that difficult time. Great expenditures of money, time, and emotional energy can sometimes be detrimental to the children of a divorcing family. If the parties need some background reading to help them deal with the issues in a more constructive and collaborative way, San Francisco collaborative family law pioneer Pauline Tesler has two excellent works:

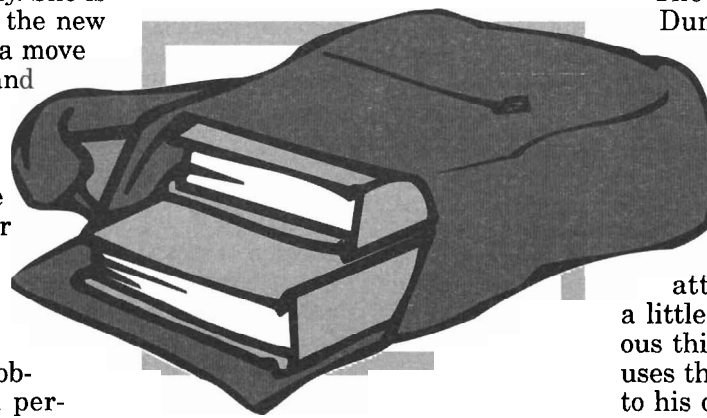
Collaborative Divorce: The Revolu-

***tionary New Way to Restructure Your Family, Resolve Legal Issues, and Move on with Your Life*, ISBN 0061148008 and the ABA published Collaborative Law handbook, ISBN 1570739315.**

Trafford, A., *Crazy Time: Surviving Divorce and Building a New Life*. ISBN 0060923091

A very popular but easy to find out of print guide to assist clients through the process without getting into the essential legal advice you provide.

Talia, S., *How to Avoid the Divorce from Hell; (and dance together at*



***your daughter's wedding*) Nexus, 2nd Ed. (October 2004) ISBN 0965107507**

Very readable, funny and insightful book to help your clients avoid some of the pitfalls of divorce and emerge with some semblance of a functioning relationship.

Ahrons, C., *The Good Divorce* Harper, (June 19, 1995) ISBN 0060926341

This is a seminal book that might be a little touchy-feely for some, but the basic theme of this book is that divorce is not necessary a "breaking up" as much as a "redefinition" of family. She coined the term "binuclear" family and the value of this book is that if the transition can be made smoothly and while minimizing the impact on the children, the chances of emerging from the divorce emotionally sound is greatly increased.

Ricci, I., *Mom's House, Dad's House: Making Two Homes for your Child*. Fireside, (November 18, 1997) ISBN 0684830787

A very valuable book written by an author who demonstrates a great deal of compassion, this is a good guide to help people with issues of shared parenting, offering ideas that they might not have thought of on their own. Not necessarily just for those exercising rotating custody.

Ventura, J. and Reed, M., *Divorce for Dummies Dummies Publishing, 2nd Ed. (June 4, 2005) ISBN 0764584170*

The books of the "_____ for Dummies" series, offensive title notwithstanding, have become a respected series of primers on various topics, and this title is no exception. It allows your client to take control of his or her own issues and offers valuable tips for helping your attorney. Although sometimes a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, a client who thoughtfully uses this book may become an asset to his or her attorney by furnishing relevant and helpful information to the attorney and referring to the book for answers to peripheral questions.

Divorce for Dummies partners well with:

Woodhouse, V. and Fetherling, D., *Divorce and Money, How to Make the Best Financial Decisions During Divorce*. NOLO, 8th Ed. (November 30, 2006) ISBN 1413305229

Filled with practical and accessible information, this book can take a lot of the pressure off the divorcing spouses when making the important financial decisions that affect their family.

There are quite a few more excellent and informative books that are not listed here. Many of the out-of-print books are readily available through online booksellers and are really too good to pass up.