

An Instant Help Book for Parents & Kids

Getting Through My Parents' Divorce

A Workbook for Children Coping
with Divorce, Parental Alienation,
and Loyalty Conflicts



33 simple

activities to help kids:

- Deal with sadness, confusion & anger
- Learn new ways to cope with worry & stress
- Tap into inherent courage & strength

AMY J. L. BAKER, PhD
KATHERINE C. ANDRE, PhD

“Amy J. L. Baker and Katherine C. Andre have written this practical and child-friendly book to help children learn resilience for coping with divorce and other difficult interpersonal situations. They focus on the real experiences of divorce from the standpoint of the child. Through brief, structured written activities and a tone of kindness and support, they offer your child a chance to work through their experiences with self-awareness and a sense of competence.”

—**Jeffrey Zimmerman, PhD, ABPP**, psychologist who specializes in working with families of divorce, mediator and collaborative divorce professional, and coauthor of *The Co-parenting Survival Guide* and *Adult Children of Divorce*

“*Getting Through My Parents’ Divorce* is a very important and timely book. Written by two experts in the field, this book provides detailed, hands-on guidance for children struggling to make sense of the often chaotic and overwhelming feelings that can result from divorce. I highly recommend it.”

—**Joshua Coleman, PhD**, psychologist and author of *When Parents Hurt: Compassionate Strategies When You and Your Grown Child Don’t Get Along*

“This is an excellent workbook for children whose parents are separated or divorced. As I read *Getting Through My Parents’ Divorce*, I wondered how this book will come into the hands of youngsters who will benefit from it. Perhaps therapists or school counselors will give this book to children from divorced families. The authors, Amy J. L. Baker and Katherine C. Andre, suggest that a parent could give this workbook to his or her child and perhaps help the child with some of the activities. Even better, let’s hope that in some families, the divorcing parents will join together in providing this book to their child—and all of them will find valuable lessons in its pages.”

—**William Bernet, MD**, Professor Emeritus in the department of psychiatry at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine, Nashville, TN

“Divorce is a family crisis. *Getting Through My Parents’ Divorce* is a series of lessons for children to strengthen their resolve, learn effective coping skills, and avoid the pitfalls of self-blame and divided loyalties.”

—**Douglas Darnell, PhD**, CEO of PsyCare, Inc., and author of *Divorce Casualties*

“Baker and Andre have created a workbook that speaks to children who are experiencing the sadness, anger, and confusion of divorce. Oftentimes a child’s voice is silenced through the divorce process. *Getting Through My Parents’ Divorce* allows their voices to be heard loud and clear. This workbook should be in the hands of every child of divorce in hopes that it will contribute to healing, which will produce mature, responsible adults. This workbook will fill children with confidence, trust, and self-esteem. This would be a priceless gift for any child who could benefit from the character-building skills offered by the authors. [This book] will change a life today so that we all have a better tomorrow!”

—**Mayor Jill Egizii**, president of the Parental Alienation Awareness Organization

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Contents

Note to Caring Adults	v
Note to Parents	vi
Welcome to Your Workbook!	vii

Part 1

When Your Parents Fight

You Are Not Alone	1
Activity 1: Think of a Workbook Buddy	4
Activity 2: Things Parents Fight About	5
Feelings, Feelings, Feelings	6
Activity 3: Feelings Kids Have When Parents Fight	6
Activity 4: Start a Feeling Journal	8
Activity 5: Feelings About Divorce	8
Activity 6: Situations and Feelings	10
Activity 7: Expressing Feelings	11

Part 2

Coping Tools

Thinking for Yourself	13
Activity 8: Knowing Your Own Thoughts and Feelings	15
Considering Your Options	17
Unfreezing the Brain: The STEP Solution	17
Activity 9: Explore Options and Picture and Practice in Your Mind	19
Activity 10: Saying What You Want	23
Living Your Values	24
Activity 11: Finding Your Core Values	25
Activity 12: Knowing Your Core Values	26
Activity 13: Living Your Core Values	28
Acting with Courage	30
Activity 14: You Were Courageous When...	31
Activity 15: Inspiring Courage Within Yourself	32

Encouraging Yourself	33
Activity 16: Is Your Self-Talk Helpful?	34
Activity 17: Practicing Self-Talk	35
De-stressing Your Mind and Body	38
Activity 18: What Ways Do You Feel Stress?	39
Activity 19: Where Do You Feel Stress in Your Body When Your Parents Fight?	40
Activity 20: Letting Go of Stress	41
Activity 21: More Ways to Let Go of Stress	42
Asking for Help from Others	44
Activity 22: Helpful Qualities	46
Activity 23: Who Would You Ask for Help?	47
Activity 24: Finding Helpful People	48

Part 3

Using the Coping Tools

Getting Started	52
Activity 25: Which Situations Are Yours?	52
Sadness	55
Activity 26: What Does Sadness Feel Like?	57
Worry	63
Activity 27: What Does Worry Feel Like?	65
Anger	71
Activity 28: What Does Anger Feel Like?	73
Hurt	79
Activity 29: What Does Hurt Feel Like?	80
Confusion	87
Activity 30: What Does Confusion Feel Like?	89
Fear	95
Activity 31: What Does Fear Feel Like?	97
Guilt	103
Activity 32: What Does Guilt Feel Like?	105
Activity 33: Guilty Words	106
To Help You Remember	113

Note to Caring Adults

If you are reading this book, it is probably because you care about a child whose family is splitting up or is in conflict. Divorce and conflict are stressful experiences for everyone involved. Children experience strong feelings that can overwhelm them and interfere with their social and emotional well-being.

In most circumstances, parents are able to help their children cope with day-to-day challenges. When parents split up, however, their own struggles can interfere with their ability to help their children.

Some children of divorce feel angry, hurt, worried, confused, guilty, sad, or afraid. Often these children feel responsible for their parents' breakup. They may keep their feelings inside, and they may think they are bad kids. We created this workbook to teach children how to manage and cope with the strong feelings that arise when parents divorce. The rules and tools they learn in this workbook will help them love and feel loved by both parents. They will become more resilient and will develop skills for facing challenges throughout their lives.

As a caring adult, you can help not only by giving a child this workbook but by lending an ear. A caring conversation might start with asking about the activities in the workbook, or asking to help with some of them. The most important thing is to show that you care and are available to listen and talk about thoughts and feelings.

By offering to listen and guide, you can make a difference in a child's life. You can help the child love and feel loved by both parents. Thank you for wanting to help.

Note to Parents

Divorce is not an easy process for a parent. You are going through a lot of changes, and your stress level may be higher than ever. Conversations with the other parent can escalate into shouting and fighting, responsibilities increase, time seems in shorter supply, emotional resources become limited, and conflict abounds. Parents can be overwhelmed, and kids sometimes receive the fallout of all of the tension and conflict. Children often blame themselves and think they are somehow responsible. Children of divorce can experience a range of strong emotions, including anger, confusion, fear, sadness, guilt, hurt, and worry.

It's best if parents can be role models to resolve conflict without fighting, but sometimes that's not possible. Unfortunately, kids start to wonder, *If my parents can't solve their problems, how can I solve mine? If my parents are fighting, maybe I am to blame.* When kids don't receive help during a divorce, they may carry these feelings and thoughts with them for years.

We created this workbook to help kids manage all the strong feelings that get stirred up when parents don't get along. This book can help you help your child when you may not be at your parenting best. Little mistakes can loom large for parents going through divorce. (For parenting advice see *Co-parenting with a Toxic Ex* by Baker and Fine, 2014.) Kids can work through the activities alone or with a caring adult, such as a counselor or you. If you do the workbook with your child, make sure you allow the child to set the pace without any pressure, expectation, or judgment. There is no rule or goal for how many activities the child should do in any one sitting. We want the workbook to be fun and engaging, not a chore to get through. Please be sure to allow your child to answer the questions and do the exercises; your child will gain the most from the workbook that way. Your suggestions or ideas can influence the way your child processes feelings.

Divorce and family conflict are hard on everyone, but the rules and tools children learn in this workbook will help them become resilient and will provide skills they can use to handle difficult situations later in life. Remember, the most important thing is that your child knows you are there for him or her. This workbook is one way to show that you care.

Welcome to Your Workbook!

This workbook is about what can happen inside you when your parents are getting divorced. It can be hard when parents fight, and you may have lots of feelings about that. These feelings may be stressing you out in a big way.

The upset you feel inside when your parents fight has different names. This workbook will help you name and cope with these feelings. When you notice and name a feeling, you start to feel better. It is easier to be okay with a feeling when you know what it is and trust that you can deal with it.

This workbook will also help you know yourself and think for yourself. You cannot control what your parents do. But you can control how you react. You can learn to be strong and think for yourself. Then, with new tools, you can choose to cope in a new and better way. When you think for yourself, you can stay out of parent problems and avoid doing things that aren't right for you. Not only will this workbook help you deal with your parents' divorce, it will help you with other problems you may face now and later in life.

It is not easy to have parents fighting and getting divorced, but you can get through this. You will learn rules and tools in this workbook that help, and you can find caring adults to talk to about your feelings. You have a right to be happy. You have a right to love and feel loved by both parents.

In this workbook you will learn:

1. How to identify and understand your feelings
2. Rules for loving and feeling loved by both parents
3. Coping tools to help you follow the rules

You Are Not Alone

Jenny is a ten-year-old girl. She has a younger brother and an older sister. Her parents used to fight a lot, and then last year they divorced. Her father moved out and she only sees him on weekends and Wednesday nights. Every time her dad picks her up her parents have an argument about money or the schedule. Jenny thought the yelling would stop after her dad moved out, but it hasn't.

Mike is ten. His mom lives in an apartment with her mother. His dad lives in an apartment with his new girlfriend. Mike has two older brothers. The three boys spend about half their time with each parent. Mike's parents act like they hate each other and argue all of the time about schedules, especially now that Mike takes karate three times a week and joined the swim team.

Maria and Miguel are eleven-year-old twins who live with their dad. Any time their mom shows up at school or basketball practice, the two parents have a big fight. When both parents are at school games, Maria and Miguel feel like they can't go over to their mom because their dad gets mad. The last time that happened, their dad told them it was time for them to choose. He wanted them to tell the judge that they don't like and don't feel safe with their mom anymore.

These kids are all dealing with parents who divorced and don't get along. It can be hard for kids when their parents fight. It can be hard staying out of parent problems. We know from experience that kids whose parents fight sometimes have a hard time loving and feeling loved by both parents. We want to help you with that by sharing some rules.

- Remember the truth about both parents
- Make good choices
- Make yourself proud
- Be brave
- Keep trying
- Get the help you need
- Take care of your mind and body

Having divorcing and fighting parents can be tough! It can be hard to follow the rules. That's why we are going to give you the tools that will help you love and feel loved by both parents.

Remember the Truth About Both Parents

Have you ever thought that one parent doesn't care about you? Is it hard to remember the good times you have had with each parent? Does it seem like one parent is all good and the other is all bad? This can happen to kids whose parents are getting divorced. You might start to believe that one of your parents isn't a safe and loving parent when it isn't true. If this happens, you have forgotten the truth. If you forget the truth, it is easy to be mad at a parent for the hurt you feel. Remembering the truth about each parent is one of the most important things you can do. That way you can love and feel loved by both parents.

Make Good Choices

Does one parent ask you to do things that may hurt or upset the other parent? Examples include spying on a parent, keeping a secret from a parent, or calling a stepparent "mom" or "dad." Do you agree to these things because you don't know what else to do? Do your choices cause problems in your relationship with one of your parents? Sometimes kids get confused about how to make good choices. They can hurt themselves or a parent when they don't mean to. If you think about your options and try to choose the best one for you, you will be making good choices. Then you will be able to love and feel loved by both parents.

Make Yourself Proud

Have you done or said things to a parent that don't feel right? When parents are divorcing, sometimes kids do things that make it hard for them to feel proud. They may be rude or hurtful to one parent just to make the other parent happy. If you know your values, such as honesty and kindness, you can live by them. Then you will be proud of yourself, and you will be able to love and feel loved by both parents.

Be Brave

Have you ever chosen to not do the right thing because it was hard? For example, have you found it hard to tell one parent that you don't want to hurt the other parent's feelings? Sometimes kids whose parents are getting divorced can be afraid to do the right thing. It can be hard to be brave. It can be hard to act in ways that don't hurt a parent. If you act with courage and are brave, you will feel better and make better choices, even when they are hard. Then you will be able to love and feel loved by both parents.

Keep Trying

Have you felt discouraged and thought that nothing will get better? Do you feel like your parents will always fight? Do you feel like giving up one parent just to please the other? If you can remember to say encouraging things to yourself, you will be able to keep trying to do the things you need to do so you can love and feel loved by both parents.

Get the Help You Need

Do you ever feel like you are dealing with your parents' problems all alone? Do you feel like you aren't getting enough help from other people? Sometimes kids whose parents are getting divorced need help dealing with their feelings. Sometimes they need a friend or a grown-up to help them figure out how to deal with their parents' problems. When you figure out who to ask for help, you can find the help you need. With help it will be easier to love and feel loved by both parents.

Take Care of Your Mind and Body

Is your parents' divorce and fighting making you feel tired or achy? Is it hard focusing and keeping your mind on school stuff? Sometimes kids whose parents are getting divorced carry a lot of stress in their mind and body. That doesn't feel good. If you can remember to de-stress, you will be able to take care of yourself and have the strength and energy you need to love and feel loved by both parents.

Being a kid with parents who are getting divorced can be tough! Sometimes it can be hard to follow the rules. That's why we are going to teach you different ways to follow them so you can love and feel loved by both parents. But first, you are going to think of a workbook buddy.

Activity 1: Think of a Workbook Buddy

Think of a workbook buddy who can be with you in your mind and heart as you go through this workbook. That way you won't have to go through it alone. Your buddy should be loyal and wise and help you feel safe even when you have strong feelings. Your buddy will help you find strength and courage when you need it.

Sit back and close your eyes. Who helps you feel calm and safe? Is it a person or an animal? In the space below, draw your buddy. Don't forget to give him or her a name.

We will remind you to think of your buddy as you go through the workbook. We will show you pictures of a friendly animal who will remind you that you are not alone. Your buddy is watching out for you!



Your buddy says, *"I am always here to help you. You are not alone. I will take this journey with you."*

Activity 2: Things Parents Fight About

This workbook is about you and how you are dealing with your parents' divorce. Every family is the same in some ways and different in other ways. But most kids have a hard time when their parents fight. Divorcing parents can fight about a lot of different things.

Circle the things below that your parents fight about. Put a star next to the ones that bother you the most. You can use your answers as you go through the workbook.

What clothes you wear

What hobbies you have

What you eat

Time you spend with each parent

What music you listen to

Your chores

What movies you see

What your hair looks like

Your name

Where the pets live

What video games you play

Child support

Who your doctors are

Who your friends are

Holidays

Your homework

What school you go to

School vacations

Feelings, Feelings, Feelings

Did you know that most kids have strong feelings when their parents fight? Strong feelings can be hard to manage until you know how to name them and cope with them. They can get in the way of following the rules for loving and feeling loved by both parents.

Activity 3: Feelings Kids Have When Parents Fight

Circle the feelings you think kids have when their parents don't get along. Put a star by the feelings you had this past week.

sad

angry

afraid

guilty

worried

confused

hurt

Did you circle and put a star next to all of the feelings? You probably did. That's because when parents fight, kids have all sorts of feelings.

It helps to name your feelings.

Did you know that naming a feeling can make you feel better? The next time you have a strong feeling, think about what you are feeling and give it a name. Try saying, "I am feeling _____ right now."

It is important to allow yourself to have feelings.

Did you know that accepting your feelings makes you feel better? By accepting them, you know it is okay to have them. Feelings are not right or wrong. You don't have to ignore them or push them away because they hurt. It can help to say out loud, "I accept all of my feelings. They are part of me." Try making up a little song to help you accept your feelings.

My feelings might be sad.

My feelings might be mad.

Sometimes it's hard

When I'm in between

Mom and Dad.

Feelings do not last forever!

When you have have a strong feeling, it may feel like the feeling will always be there. But feelings come and go. They don't last. The next time you have a strong feeling, try saying, "I am feeling _____ right now, but I will feel better and different soon."

Activity 4: Start a Feeling Journal

In a notebook or journal, write down what you are feeling. Choose a few times a day to write in your journal. It could be after breakfast, before dinner, or before bedtime. After you write in your journal for a few days you will probably see that your feelings change during the day and from day to day. Was it hard to be okay with any of your feelings? Did you think any of your feelings were good or bad?

You know that feelings don't last forever, and that it's okay to have them. But it doesn't feel good when you have a strong feeling, and it is okay to tell yourself that. You might say to yourself, *Gee, I am feeling kind of sad right now. I wish I weren't. I wouldn't want my friend to feel this way, but it's okay.*

Activity 5: Feelings About Divorce

Read the story and then answer the questions below.

Brandy and Justin are ten-year-old twins. They live with their mom and dad. Brandy and Justin are doing homework when their mom calls them into the living room. They think they did something wrong and quietly sit down on the couch, as their mother asks them to. Instead of getting scolded, she tells them that their dad is moving out of the home because they are getting a divorce. Brandy starts to cry.

"Doesn't Daddy love us anymore?" Brandy asks her mom.

"Of course he does, honey," Mom explains. "It is just that we have been fighting a lot. I think you know that because you hear us yelling. We want to have more peace in our lives, and we think we can have that if our family lives in two homes."

Justin feels like he is boiling inside. "You are both stupid," he calls out as he throws his book on the floor. He races to his bedroom and slams the door.

What are Brandy and Justin probably feeling when they go into the living room?

What do you think it was like for Brandy and Justin to hear their parents yelling at each other?

Do you think Brandy and Justin wish their parents would stay together even though they fight?

Why does Brandy cry? _____

What is Justin feeling when he is "boiling" inside? _____

How are you like Brandy? _____

How are you like Justin? _____

Activity 6: Situations and Feelings

When parents are getting divorced, kids have strong feelings. It may help you to know that other kids, such as Brandy and Justin, have strong feelings as well. It can help to know what situations can lead to certain feelings. This way, when you expect a feeling to come, you may not feel as bothered by it.

Draw a line from the feeling to a situation that causes you to have that feeling. There are no right or wrong answers. You may have the same feeling in different situations. It's okay if one feeling has many lines coming to it or if one situation has many lines connected to it.

Mom and Dad yell at each other.

Worried

One parent says something private and personal about the other parent.

Sad

One parent puts down the rules of the other parent.

One parent says mean and untrue things about the other parent.

Angry

You ignore or are rude to one parent so the other parent will be nicer to you.

Confused

One parent hints that you should spend more time with him or her.

One parent tries to get you to move in with him or her.

Afraid

One parent calls the other parent by his or her first name.

Guilty

One parent gets rid of photos of the other parent.

One parent calls you a name and says you are just like the other parent.

Hurt

One parent says the other parent is trying to get all of the family's money.

Activity 7: Expressing Feelings

Kids have strong feelings when their parents don't get along. It is never wrong to have a feeling. But there are different ways kids deal with feelings. Some may be helpful and some may be unhelpful. If you follow the rules, it will be easier to love and feel loved by both parents. You deserve to be loved!

Draw a line from the feeling to a way to deal with the feeling that you think would be helpful. There are no right or wrong answers. It's okay if one feeling has many lines coming to it or if one way of dealing has many lines connected to it.

Worried	Talk to a friend who cares	Figure out what's bothering you
	Talk to a counselor	Stay in bed
Sad	Cry	Accept the feeling
	Do nothing	Watch a sad movie
Angry	Write in a journal	Draw a picture
	Wish things could be better	Name the feeling
Afraid	Yell at someone	Talk to a parent
	Hug a pet	Do something really special for yourself
Guilty	Have a temper tantrum	Talk to yourself with kind words
	Join a support group at school	