

## **Common Family Reactions to Divorce and Other Stressors**

### **I'll go live with...(the other parent)!**

This is a common statement made by children when they are angry. It has NOTHING to do with where they want to live. What the child is saying is that she/he is angry with you and is using this way to express his/her anger (like the 2 year-old who says, "I don't like you anymore!"). Don't respond by saying, "Go live with...(the other parent) then" - that is missing the point and saying it's NOT okay to be angry. DO say, "I know you are angry with me right now."

### **You're just like...(the other parent).**

This happens when the child does something negative that reminds the parent of the ex-spouse. The parent gets unreasonable, angry, rejecting, and is fearful that the child will grow up to be exactly like all the bad parts of the ex. This is NOT true; the parent is forgetting that it is okay and normal for a child to act like a child - it was NOT okay for the ex-spouse to act like a child.

### **Over-indulging the child.**

DO set reasonable and consistent limits for your children. Over-indulging your children only adds to the confusion. You can increase your child's sense of security by making rules simple, expectations clear, and consequences clear and appropriate.

### **Feeling like a failure.**

DO FORGIVE YOURSELF AND YOUR EX. Concentrate on rearing your children in a healthy manner. Rejecting yourself as a failure will only make life more difficult for you and for your children. All normal people make mistakes. Choose to learn from these mistakes, and not be overcome by them.

### **Using your child to meet companionship needs.**

DO develop adult relationships to meet your need for companionship; DON'T use your children to meet this need. Allowing your child to sleep with you or burdening him/her with YOUR problems can eventually lead to emotional problems for the child.

### **Feeling that your child should be loyal to you.**

DO reassure your child that it is okay to live with both parents. Children cannot choose one parent over another because their own identity includes aspects of both parents. Rejecting a parent means rejecting or feeling badly about a part of themselves.