

Trouble dealing with parents' divorce... twelve years after ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have been going through emotional problems lately. I have been crying a lot and thinking about my mom and dad's divorce and how I want them together. I don't understand why now, after all these years, it is bothering me. It has never bothered me till this past school year and nothing has happened in school either.

I keep thinking about how I will never know how it was to live with both my parents. On Christmas, I kept thinking about how I really only had one true Christmas with both of them together and I don't even remember it. People always say the younger the child is when parents get a divorce, the easier it is on a child, but for some reason, that's not true for me because I missed out on it all! All my friends have at least experienced their parents together, and I haven't and never will. They get along fine so it's not like they fight. I haven't told anyone about this and it is getting to the point I can't keep it to myself and can't stop crying. I don't know what to do anymore. I just don't know why it is bothering me twelve years after they got a divorce and how I can get it to go away. Please help.

— Jenny

Answer

Dear Jenny,

Divorce can be one of the most difficult transitions a family may go through. There's no "right time" to stop or — in your case — start thinking about how your parents' divorce has affected you. Many people struggle to understand their parents' break-up — whether it happened last month, last year, or last decade. Additionally, research indicates that children of divorced parents can experience effects from their parents' divorce, regardless of the type of relationship the parents have after the split. It's also very common to fantasize about "the perfect family" around the holidays. After all, many people — young and old alike — may feel letdown and lonely during the holidays, due to a variety of family circumstances. The fact that you have begun to recognize your feelings shows that you're willing to do what it takes to start feeling better.

Since you were young when your parents got divorced, it may have been difficult for you to

understand exactly what was happening. However, even though it happened a long time ago, some research indicates that the effects of divorce on children can be long-term, and for some, they may even last into adulthood. Additionally, just because the event happened years ago doesn't mean you still couldn't experience those feelings now. Back then, you may not have known how to express your worries, confusion, sadness, disappointment, or questions. In fact, children from families with divorced parents may experience more sadness, anxiety, or loneliness than those whose parents aren't divorced. Parents divorcing while kids are younger may also impact their self-esteem more than kids whose parents got divorced when they were older. That could be a possible explanation for why you're experiencing these feelings now, and you certainly aren't alone. You mentioned that nothing has happened in school that you think might be the cause of your new thoughts and feelings. However, could any of these situations be true for you?:

- Is either one of your parents dating someone new or gotten engaged or remarried? You've expressed that you'd like your parents to be together, but maybe this possibility seems less likely if they're finding new partners.
- Have your friends made comments or asked questions about your parents, their relationship, or your family in general? Maybe a seemingly innocuous comment has triggered some thoughts about your family that you haven't experienced before now.
- You mentioned that your parents don't fight. Have your parents communicated to you why they divorced? If they haven't, you may find it helpful to learn more if they're willing to share. It may provide you more understanding and help you with accepting their divorce. It's possible that your parents don't argue when they're around you, or that they express their disagreement without "fighting." Also, couples break up for lots of different reasons; the reasons for your parent's divorce may not be obvious to you, and may not be to them, either.
- Many children of divorced parents divide their time between each parent's home, so it may seem as though you don't have enough time with either of them. Relationships with parents can change due to a divorce, so it's possible that the divorce has affected your relationship with one or both of your parents. Do your parents set aside time to talk and hang out with you? Has there been a change in either of your daily routines?
- Now that you're older, you may be wondering about how to make your own romantic relationships work or how to trust people. Children of divorce have reported their own hesitations with romantic relationships, feeling concerned that their parents didn't provide a positive model and fearing that any of their relationships would also end. Maybe you worry that you'll make the same "mistakes" as your parents. Lots of people worry about the very same things — even into their adulthood. Being conscious of your feelings, and expressing them, as you seem to be now, helps to make relationships successful.

These are just some examples of reasons you may be thinking about their divorce more now than you have in the past. Taking some time to think about what may be causing you to think about it more may help you figure out why it's becoming more upsetting. It also may be helpful to re-focus your attention to the positive aspects of your family. For example, what do you like about your family? What do you enjoy doing together? Are there any traditions that you particularly like? If not, are there any that you'd like to start? Are there other people in your immediate or extended family with whom you enjoy spending time?

It may also be helpful to share your feelings with someone you trust, such as a friend, another

family member, member of the clergy, or health care provider. Additionally, you may find comfort in speaking with a mental health professional. They may be help you sort through your feelings and if you believe it would be helpful, point you towards group counseling programs where you can work with other folks going through a similar transition. Even so, have you considered talking to your parents about how you've been feeling? After all, even though your parents don't live together anymore, it doesn't mean that you can't turn to them when you need help. It may be difficult for parents to talk with their kids about their divorce. By talking with your mom and dad about the way you've been feeling, you'll have the chance to share something about yourself with them, and maybe even learn a bit about them, too.

Be proud of yourself for taking the first steps to better understand your feelings about your parents' divorce!

Alice!

Category:

[Emotional Health](#) [2]

[Blues & Depression](#) [3]

[Miscellaneous](#) [4]

Related questions

[Finding low-cost counseling](#) [5]

[Healthy versus unhealthy relationships](#) [6]

[How to find a therapist](#) [7]

Resources

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\) \(Morningside\)](#) [8]

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [9]

[Mental Health Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [10]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [11]

Published date:

Feb 11, 2000

Last reviewed on:

Feb 01, 2019

Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
 - [Media Inquiries](#)
 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)

- [Full Site Syndication](#)
- [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/trouble-dealing-parents-divorce-twelve-years-after-0>

Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/trouble-dealing-parents-divorce-twelve-years-after-0>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/emotional-health>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/blues-depression>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/miscellaneous-0>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/finding-low-cost-counseling>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/healthy-versus-unhealthy-relationships-0>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/how-find-therapist-0>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/counseling-and-psychological-services-cps-morningside>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-services-cuimc>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>