

KID health

▶ HELPING KIDS COPE

PARENTS' TIP LIST

- ▶ **Assure the children** that they are not the cause of the divorce.
- ▶ **Don't talk negatively** about your spouse within earshot of the kids.
- ▶ **Be truthful** and don't encourage false hopes for a reconciliation.
- ▶ **Make sure children** still get to spend time with their friends, attend practices and games and see their extended families. ■



The impact of divorce on kids

BY ASHLEY ELIOT

While changes in our economy continue to hit our wallets hard, these challenging times can also cause a major strain on our relationships. With layoffs, tighter budgets, volatile gas prices and an uncertain economy, it's easy to forget the stress children bear during tough times.

Dr. Kathleen Nickerson, a licensed clinical psychologist and founder of Coastal Counseling and Coaching in Irvine, sees this first-hand.

"I have seen an increase in the couples requesting therapy," she says. "I get about 14 calls per day, which is about 25 percent more than usual."

As stress levels rise, relationships often weaken. Nickerson says the best way to preserve the relationship is to work as a team and understand that by working together, couples can overcome obstacles.

There is some good news: Even though the economy has impacted many families, the Orange County legal community has seen a decline in family law cases, according to Lisa Hughes, founding partner of Hughes and Sullivan Family Law in Tustin.

"This is a remarkable trend, since financial crisis or turmoil is typically a breaking point for many relationships and a catalyst for divorce," Hughes says.

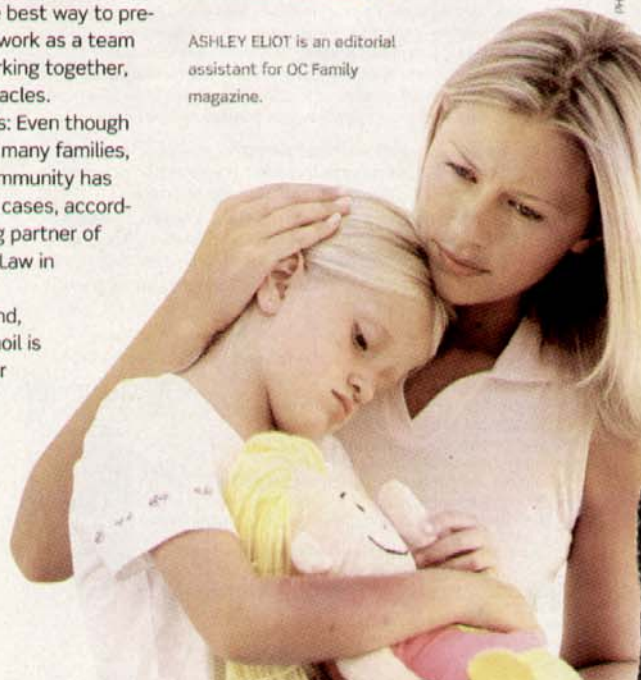
What about divorce's impact on children? Divorce at

any age is emotionally draining. It's possible that children will act out in a number of ways, including aggression, stomach problems or headaches, and changes in sleeping patterns and eating and study habits.

"Parents going through a divorce need to constantly keep their kids' mental health a priority, working to minimize tension and aggression toward the other spouse, no matter what the circumstances are," Hughes says.

In every case, children need to know that both parents love them, that they will continue to be protected and cared for, and that they were not the cause of their parents' split. ■

ASHLEY ELIOT is an editorial assistant for OC Family magazine.



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