

Community Voices

Divorces affect the children, as well

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When hearing that someone had left her husband for a man on the Internet, a relative told me: "Luckily, their children aren't young." That relative apparently had little clue about what it's like to be a teenager with divorced parents.

My parents parted about 34 years ago, when I was 16. I recall that, after their separation, my mom no longer referred to my father as "Dad," but called him "your father," and Dad would inquire about "your mother." Their divorce decree also seemed to have granted some relatives permission to free-associate long-held opinions about their former in-law.

A divorce is *not* like getting the family car's wheels realigned; a divorce is a break in the chassis. Children of divorce spend their lifetime straddling the parental Mason-Dixon

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Line that divides dual households and already-overwhelmed schedules — stretching limited vacation time into two Thanksgivings, two holiday dinners, two New Year's open houses, and two Fourth of July picnics.

When grandchildren come along, Grandmom and Grandpop snap photos for different family albums. At special milestones, children of divorce deliberate about whether to seat the divorced grandparents with other estranged or strained family members, or to not invite them at all.

If children are lucky, the parents remarry someone who melds the family into some semblance of a whole. Even though my father died almost 13 years ago, my stepmother still works to fuse her families together. Since I have known her, she has never once said a disparaging word about my mom or that side of the family.

Divorce within a family does not need to be contentious, as long as *all* parties involved understand that *all* children of divorce — regardless of their age — are affected by the schism and, therefore, flourish best from acceptance, not animosity.