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## **Are Kids Doomed When Parents Divorce?**

By Sherri Rodgers-Conti, Executive Director of Southeast CASA

When I was eight years old and my brother was six, our parents divorced. It was the mid-60's and I didn't know anyone else whose parents had divorced. Our world suddenly changed in very significant ways.

Because our mom had to work full time, we became “latch key” kids after school. As the older child, it was my responsibility to make sure my brother and I were behaving and safe for those hours before she came home. Suddenly, we were only getting to spend an occasional evening or Saturday with our dad. Summers were the hardest time of all as that meant that we were on our own every day.

But it wasn't all bad. My brother and I became pretty self-sufficient. Our extended family stepped up to help, so we spent a lot of time with our grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins. One of the neighborhood moms became our safety net if we needed anything during the days that we were home alone.

As I got older I realized that a lot of other kids' parents were divorced, and I understood that things could have been a lot worse for my brother and me. We were never abused, we never had to deal with an addicted parent, and we always had ample food and a nice home in which to live. Both of our parents were still involved in our lives and cared deeply about our well-being. They both seemed to be happier people. We never questioned that we were loved by our parents.

To this day I don't like the phrase “broken home”. It paints a picture that EVERY child whose parents are divorced will be damaged goods, never to be happy, confident,

successful, or loyal. This is just not true for most children of divorce. It isn't true of my brother and me, and it isn't true of my children who are also children of divorce.

I did a little digging to see what the experts have to say about the impact of divorce on children. According to an article in *The Scientific American*, researchers found that only a small percentage of children experience serious problems in the wake of divorce or, later, as adults. Divorce negatively affects most children in the short run, but research suggests that kids recover rapidly after the initial blow. The key to a well-adjusted child of divorce is the continued involvement in their life by their parents. Children will also do better if parents can limit any conflict associated with the divorce process and minimize the child's exposure to it. Parents can also support their children during this difficult time by talking to them clearly about the divorce and its implications and answering their questions fully.

Divorce is painful and difficult, but long-term harm to the children of divorce is rare. Most kids adjust, adapt, and thrive with their "new normal", and do well as long as their parents continue to be loving parents.