

**SMPG: The Heart of SENG**  
**Helping Your Gifted Child Through Divorce: Part 1**  
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[http://www.sengifted.org/SMPG/smpg\\_september11\\_column.shtml](http://www.sengifted.org/SMPG/smpg_september11_column.shtml)

*In 1981, SENG established guidelines for SENG Model Parent Support Groups (SMPGs). SMPGs bring together groups of interested parents of gifted and talented children to discuss such topics as motivation, discipline, stress management, and peer relationships. This column offers information and advice based on the experience of trained SMPG facilitators, both to apply in their own parent groups and for other parents to use and learn from. Learn more about the SMPG program at [http://www.sengifted.org/smpg\\_parent\\_groups.shtml](http://www.sengifted.org/smpg_parent_groups.shtml).*

Week Ten of the SENG Model Parent Group (SMPG) is a discussion around Chapter 11 of *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children*, "Complexities of Successful Parenting." There are many complex topics in this discussion, but one of the most important is divorce and its impact on gifted children. Many SENG Model Parent Groups are eight-week groups and leave out this very important topic. As I see gifted children in my private practice, it has become very apparent that this topic needs to be addressed.

James Webb, Ph.D. writes in *A Parent's Guide to Gifted Children*, "The consequences of divorce and family separation may be even more severe for gifted children because of their sensitivity to emotions." (p. 235)

Divorce can have many effects on the gifted and emotionally sensitive child. Children can develop insecurities and fears for the future. Many changes happen through the process of a divorce – changes in parenting styles, living arrangements, even schools and access to their friends. Questions arise, such as "Will we have to find a new place to live? Will I be able to keep my dog? Will I ever see my friends?"

One parent is no longer in the home. Children may fear abandonment by the absent parent and also wonder if the parent at home will also leave them. If abandonment is not the issue, rejection may be. Many children feel rejected

and unloved by the absent parent. Those feelings of abandonment and rejection can lead to thoughts of blame. Children may feel that the divorce was their fault, and feelings of fault can lead to shame and guilt. When children feel at fault for the divorce, they want to take responsibility for fixing things. When the parents do not reunite, the child may feel powerless. Additional feelings that children face during the process of a divorce include grief, depression, stress, anxiety, loneliness, and anger.

How you approach the divorce process can help alleviate some of these stressors for the child. Even if your children are aware of the disintegration of your relationship, and they are not surprised by the divorce announcement, it is vital to focus on your children's feelings and put aside your own feelings when telling your children of the divorce. Remember that gifted children are very insightful, overexcitable, and complex thinkers and may ask some very difficult questions. When making the announcement, try to find some time when both parents can be present, when everyone is calm, and there is enough time to address all of the children's questions.

Remember the effects of divorce and match your explanation to those effects. Remember that children are probably worried about the future, so explain what will happen, and focus on how it will affect the children's lives. Explain who

will live where, when the move will happen, and when the parents will be able to see each parent.

Remember that the children may be thinking that they are to blame, so take time to reassure them that the divorce is not their fault and that both parents will continue to love and parent them. Allow the children time to ask questions and try to answer them as truthfully and factually as possible without blame or angry comments. Try to explain some of the feelings that they may have and that those feelings are normal in this situation. Let them know you will be willing to listen to them now or anytime in the future. Let them know that it is ok if they don't want to talk to you, but would rather talk with a trusted friend, another family member or even a counselor.

Next month, in part two of this article, I will explore how to help gifted children through the transition without falling into enmeshment or treating them as though they were adults. You can also order the SENGinar "Helping Gifted Children Cope with Trauma," in which Marc Caplan and I discuss the gamut of personal trauma, from divorce through global disasters: [https://s50189.gridserver.com/webinar\\_download\\_order\\_form.shtml](https://s50189.gridserver.com/webinar_download_order_form.shtml)