

Yes, You Can Raise Happy Children After Divorce

What kids really need to thrive

Author Wendy Paris from Psychology Today

Continued.

Research shows that about 80-percent of children of divorce adapt well and see no lasting negative effects on their grades, social adjustment, or mental health. These findings arrive from a variety of sources, including a 20-year study done by psychologist Constance Ahrons, published as the book *We're Still Family*. Development psychologist Mavis Hetherington's work following 2,500 children of divorce also showed about 80-percent of the kids doing well, as did a 2012 meta-survey analyzing about a thousand studies on childhood adjustment done over the last four decades, conducted by child development expert and Cambridge University professor Michael Lamb.

Michael Lamb's meta-study, "Mothers, Fathers, Families, and Circumstances: Factors Affecting Children's Adjustment," sums up the features of a supportive childhood:

- Children do well when they have good relationships with both parents or primary caregivers, adults who basically get along. **But those parents don't need to be married or living in the same house.**
- Children benefit from emotionally stable parents—adults who are recuperated enough, in the case of divorce, to focus on the basic job of parenting, including establishing stability, exercising fair discipline, providing love and being emotionally responsive. But those parents need not be married or living in the same house.
- Children need adequate resources such as food, safe housing, and social support. But they don't need a mansion with every toy available, and those resources can be provided by parents who are not married or living in the same house.

What Lamb's exhaustive overview and the work of dozens of other scholars shows is that marriage isn't what matters so much to a child's wellbeing, but rather a loving relationship with parents who aren't embroiled in conflict, and a decent home life. All families have good times and bad, and children face any number of disappointments as they grow. Divorce is a subset of parenting, not some freakish, outlier experience.