

# YOUTH WITH DIVORCED/ SEPARATED PARENTS

## INCLUSIVENESS

' When mom and dad went to war the only prisoners they took were the children.'

- Pat Conroy

The Aim of Scouting is to promote the development of individuals, enabling them to grow and take their place in society as active citizens. As we move forward with the Canadian Path we are much more aware of each individual's personal progression, inclusive of their varying abilities. This inclusiveness within Scouting uniquely positions us to play an important role in modifying community attitudes and behaviour towards individuals with identified needs; it starts with Scouts.

Please use this guide for a better understanding of youth with Divorce/Separated Parents; how as Scouters, we can make a difference through simple interventions, program modifications and knowing where to get help when needed.

## DESCRIPTION

When parents feel that they can no longer live together, youth can feel as if their world has been turned upside down. The level of upset the youth feels can vary depending on how their parents separated, the age of the youth, how much they understand, and the support they get from parents, family and friends.

## Sole Legal Custody

This gives one parent the decision-making rights, responsibilities, and authority related to the health, education and welfare of the youth.

## Joint Legal Custody

This gives parents shared decision-making rights, responsibilities, and authority related to the health, education and welfare of the youth.

## Physical Custody

This designates where the youth will reside and who provides the care and supervision; often the youth will reside in one home one week/weekend and in the other home the following week/weekend.

## CHARACTERISTICS/BEHAVIOURS

Youth with Divorce/Separated Parents may exhibit some of the following characteristics or behaviours:

- Stress, confusion, and sadness
- Feelings of uncertainty and anger about parents' breakup
- Feelings of apprehension and anxiety
- Youth may express their anger, rage, and resentment with parents for destroying their sense of normalcy
- Youth feel anxious when faced with the big changes in their lives from the marriage breakdown
- Sadness about the family's new situation is normal, and sadness coupled with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness could manifest as a mild form of depression
- May result in possible sleep problems, poor concentration, and academic difficulty at school
- There may be potential outbursts of anger and withdrawal from loved ones
- Where there is parental conflict there is a greater risk of long-term negative effects on the youth

## IN A SCOUTING SITUATION

- Strive to have both parents actively involved in communicating with the Scouters in the youth's life (where custody agreements allow)
- Both parents should have equal access to Scouting program information unless there is legal documentation, such as a protective order, prohibiting access
- Clarify with parents, the roles that step-parents may be involved in (pick-up, drop-off youth, etc.)
- Non-residential parents often feel excluded by organizations
- Where appropriate, invite non-residential parents to participate in outings/field trips



- Involving the non-residential parent in activities, when appropriate, encourages and supports that parent's involvement in the youth's life
- Be sensitive to the family diversity dynamic, avoiding such terminology as "broken home" and "real parent"
- When appropriate, encourage both parents to take an interest in their youth's Scouting experience
- Be understanding and supportive of different types of families
- Be open to youth appropriately expressing their feelings and support positive parent-youth relationships

## **PROGRAM MODIFICATION SUGGESTIONS**

- None

## **FURTHER ASSISTANCE**

This Info Sheet is a resource guide only and is not intended to be therapeutic, diagnostic, medical, or legal advice. Our best source of assistance for youth with identified needs is the youth's parents or caregivers; the information provided is designed to support the relationship that exists between a youth and his/her parents or healthcare providers and the Scouters involved with the youth.

## **SOURCES**

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/parentsandyouthinfo/parentsscarers/divorceorseparation.aspx>, [http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children\\_divorce.html](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/children_divorce.html), and material adapted and used by permission of The Scout Association (UK), Scouts Australia, and Scouting Ireland.

