

# Massive study finds parenting practices don't suffer during divorce

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New research is challenging the notion that parents who divorce necessarily exhibit a diminished capacity to parent in the period following divorce. A large, longitudinal study conducted by University of Alberta sociology professor Lisa Strohschein has found that divorce does not change parenting behavior, and that there are actually more similarities than differences in parenting between recently divorced and married parents.

The study used data from the 1994 and 1996 cycles of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NSLCY) to compare changes in parenting practices between 208 households that divorced between the first and follow up interview and 4796 households that remained intact.

Strohschein looked at three measures of parenting behavior (nurturing, consistent, and punitive parenting) to tap into the different ways that divorce is believed to disrupt parenting practices. Her results show that there are no differences between divorced and stably married parents for any parenting behavior either before or after a divorce has occurred.

“My findings that parenting practices are unrelated to divorce appear to fly in the face of accepted wisdom,” states Strohschein. “Undoubtedly, some parents will be overwhelmed and unable to cope with the demands of parenting in the post-divorce period, but the expectation that all parents will be negatively affected by divorce is unfounded.”

“This study is important because governments in both Canada and the US have allocated considerable resources over the past decade to provide parenting seminars on a mandatory or voluntary basis to parents who legally divorce,” says Strohschein. “Although these programs do assist parents and children in adjusting to divorce, it is equally clear that not all parents will be well served by such programs. For those who work directly with families during the divorce process, this means making greater effort to build on the existing strengths of parents.”

“Researchers need to shed much more light on the predictors of parenting behavior in the post-divorce period so that this knowledge can be used to design programs that effectively target the real needs of divorced parents,” says Strohschein.

This study appears in *Family Relations*.

Source: University of Alberta

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