

Does it Matter How Old You Are When Your Parents Divorce?



By Jane Greer, PhD for GalTime.com

jessica simpson's parents file for divorce

Tina and Joe Simpson, parents to pop stars Jessica and Ashlee, have filed for divorce after 34 years of marriage, citing "discord or conflict of personalities." There have been rumors that Joe had an affair with a young man, though the couple denied any third-party complications, saying it was an amicable split.

Whatever the reason, whenever there are children involved –

even grown children – it is hard not to wonder how the kids are taking it. Jessica Simpson has said she is [sad](#), but remains focused on the priorities of her own life – raising her new baby Maxwell and managing her post-partum weight loss. Ashlee has not yet spoken publicly about her parents' split.

We all can appreciate the enormity of divorce, and the toll it takes on everyone involved, especially the children. With that in mind, it is easy to understand why sometimes parents who are unhappy make it a priority to stay together while the children are young, raising them as a unit until they reach adulthood, before they make the move to break up. The idea, or hope, is that if they wait until their children have their own lives with their own careers and families, then maybe the divorce won't have such a big impact. Maybe it will be just a small blip on their radar screens.

WHAT TO EXPECT AS AN ADULT WHEN YOUR PARENTS DIVORCE

While it might be true that, as an older person, you are better equipped to deal with that sort of emotional trauma. It also may be true that you are not dependent on your parents in the same way a young child is. However, it doesn't minimize the fact that the family you have always known, the image of which you carried around with you your whole life, no longer exists.

Whatever age you might be when a divorce occurs, it is likely that you will have a strong reaction to it. After all, it is the demise of the family you knew as a child from which you drew much of your emotional security. At the very least, you can expect it to be jarring. You may go through a potpourri of feelings, beginning with a sense of abandonment because the parents you've counted on are no longer there for you as a team. You may also feel rejected, taking their decision personally, and wonder if your mother and father don't love you enough to stay together. You might even feel betrayed, and want to blame either one or both of them. Ironically, if your

parents had an extremely contentious or stormy marriage, you might even find yourself feeling relieved that they are getting divorced, and then guilty for feeling that way.

HOW TO COPE

Make room for the idea that your parents' divorce – no matter how old you are – can have a big impact on you. Increasing your self-awareness can help you cope so you can handle the negative feelings and keep them from spilling over into your own relationships.

Be patient with yourself and your parents, recognizing that it is their marriage and, no matter how close you might be, it is impossible to fully comprehend what goes on between two people unless you are one of them. Remember that your parents don't have a problem with you or with the family as a whole, but some unresolvable problem with each other. With that in mind, you will hopefully be able to side step the blame, and avoid being forced to take sides or being pulled into their battle.

Finally, determine the sort of relationship you want to maintain with each of your parents separate from the anger and animosity that is going on between them.

It is still so early for Jessica and Ashlee to process their feelings about their parents' divorce. But hopefully, they will be able to move forward without losing too much, and be able to hold onto what is important to them. And if your parents are separated, divorcing or apart, here's hoping you have the support to move on, too.