

ALBUQUERQUE DIVORCE LAWYER BLOG

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Divorce and Kids: Do the Math!

By Collins & Collins

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Divorce involves many adjustments and changes, including the separation of family members into separate homes, the division of property and the observance of child custody schedules. These disruptions can have profound and long-term effects on children. Many the negative consequences have long been established. One change that has only recently been noted involves the possibility of decreased math performance for kids involved in divorce.

A new study revealed that divorce may have negative effects on children's math scores. Hyun Sik Kim, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison used information collected from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, which consisted of 3,500 U.S. children entering kindergarten in 1998 through their 5th grade year. The study allowed Kim to monitor families throughout the divorce process.

The negative effect on math scores cannot be easily explained; however, it may be that the skills required for mathematics are more sensitive to external factors, such as divorce. Math involves more mental agility and concentration than other areas of study. If a child is dealing with anxiety or other negative emotions, there may be more difficulty in dealing with the complexity of mathematical equations.

Interestingly, math difficulties did not appear to surface during the time preceding the divorce, but only after parents were in the midst of the divorce process. Experts believe that this is an indication that pre-divorce conflict may not have as much do with poor performance as the sense of change and loss experienced by children in a divorce.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that children suffering from a math setback associated with divorce ever catch back up to their peers, yet experts agree that more long-term studies are needed. And the news is not all bad, as there was no measurable drop in reading scores among children of divorce. Experts believe this area of study

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may not call on the same mental skill set as mathematics. Reading requires more memorization and less building upon previously taught concepts.

Parents can attempt to minimize the effect of divorce on their children by responding early, remaining available and providing support. They can also try to keep transitions as smooth as possible and provide some security through predictable and stable routines. Most importantly, parents can alert teachers to the changes in their children's lives. Teachers can then remain mindful to observe declines in math performance and provide added support when necessary.

If you are facing a divorce with children, the guidance of an experienced family law attorney can be invaluable in identifying the many options for minimizing the negative impact of the process on the children. Changes and stress may be inevitable in a divorce, but poor math performance need not be if parents are aware and sensitive to the issues. After all, the standard in New Mexico for child custody and time-sharing is the "best interests of the child" and failures in math hardly achieve this goal.

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