

DEALING WITH

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TARYN WILSON'S LIFE WAS SHAKEN UP WHEN HER PARENTS SPLIT UP. FIND OUT WHAT SHE DID TO STAY CONNECTED WITH HER PARENTS AND COME TO TERMS WITH THE DIVORCE.

When 15-year-old Taryn Wilson envisions herself as an adult, she sees

the following: She's working as a music teacher, she's living in a comfortable house, she's in a healthy and **committed marriage**, she's a mom and her kids are living happily and without a lot of stress. "I want to be able to go away on family vacations and have nothing to worry about at home," Taryn tells *Choices*.

It's not surprising that Taryn is focused on creating an idyllic future

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home life. Her own childhood was rough. Taryn says her mom is an alcoholic and also suffers from depression. “There were a lot of ups and downs in my family,” Taryn says. “My mom’s depression would get out of hand, and we would get her some help. She’d be OK for a little while, but then the problems would start all over again.”

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Splitting Up

The alcoholism and depression put a tremendous strain on her parents’ marriage, and in 2004 Taryn’s mom and dad **divorced**. When Taryn heard the news, she was heartbroken. “I was pretty upset about the whole thing because my mom couldn’t afford to live near us, and my dad wouldn’t be able to afford to pay for her to live near us,” Taryn says. “At the time, I definitely thought my parents could have worked harder to stay together.”

Four years later, Taryn’s anger has eased a bit, and she has a better understanding of why her parents aren’t together anymore. “I’m older, and I understand a little more about the problems they had,” Taryn says. “I do believe their splitting up was the better choice, but it does get hard at times.”



TARYN HAS LIVED WITH HER DAD (RIGHT) EVER SINCE THE DIVORCE.



WORDS TO KNOW

Committed marriage: When two married people have decided to make their relationship work, even if there are problems.

Divorce: The action of legally ending a marriage between two people.

Role model: A person, usually someone who is older or has more experience, whom others can look up to and try to copy their behavior.

“I DON’T WANT THE SAME THING HAPPENING TO ME WHEN I’M OLDER THAT HAPPENED TO MY PARENTS. I DO WANT TO GET MARRIED IN THE FUTURE, BUT ONLY WHEN I’M POSITIVE THAT I’M READY TO HANDLE IT.”

Taryn and her brothers live with their father in Clifton Park, New York. After the divorce, their mom moved to Maine. Taryn and her parents have had to devise a schedule that works for the adults and for Taryn, who is a competitive rower, plays the violin in the school orchestra, and performs in school musicals. Her father is able to see her participate in all of her activities on a regular basis. Her mother comes to one concert per year, one rowing race per season, and to the school musical. Taryn spends at least one school vacation with her mom and at least one week in Maine during the summer. During holidays, Taryn rotates between houses from year to year, depending on the occasion.

Mixed Emotions

If the schedule sounds hectic, it is. And fitting her parents into her life can be tough emotionally too. Often, Taryn feels guilty for leaning heavily on her father to make sure her basic, everyday needs are met while the time she spends with her mother—because it’s so rare—is mostly leisurely and fun. “It’s kind of like I see my mom as a good friend and my dad as my mom *and* dad,” Taryn says. “The conflicting emotions are a little difficult.”

Part of the conflict has to do with Taryn wishing her mom were more available as a **role model**. “I don’t really have a strong female figure to guide me in life right now,” she says.

Taryn copes with her parents’ divorce by doing the following:

▶ Focusing on her own life and setting positive goals for herself.

Taryn is ranked third in the United States in the women’s junior double-rowing category. As an elite athlete, she needs to stay in shape, so she channels any stress she feels into her workouts. She also maintains a nutritious diet and keeps up a healthier lifestyle than many of her peers, mostly because of her mother’s health problems. “I stay away from alcohol and stuff like that,” Taryn says. “Kids in my grade have started to pressure me to do stupid things, and knowing that it can ruin families and break up relationships, I choose not to be a part of those kinds of things.”

▶ Being mature about marriage.

With high school yet to finish, plus college to look forward to, Taryn is not thinking about getting married any time soon. But if and when that time comes in her life, she won’t be taking marriage lightly. “I don’t want the same thing happening to me when I’m older that happened to my parents. I do want to get married in the future, but only when I’m positive that I’m ready to handle it.”

▶ Accepting her parents’ divorce

While her parents’ breakup is still painful to think about sometimes, Taryn is determined not to let the divorce depress her. “The experience of it all helped me grow as a person,” she says. That doesn’t mean that she’s completely free of stress when it comes to dealing with her parents. But she understands that she can’t control her parents’ relationship and that neither her mom nor dad wants the divorce to ruin her life. Taryn tells kids who are in divorced families: “Don’t let a divorce stop you from following your dreams and trying something new.”

—Lex Burling



WHETHER IT’S CELEBRATING WITH CREW TEAMMATES, ROWING, OR ACTING ONSTAGE, TARYN STAYS BUSY.

expert advice

It can be tough dealing with your parents' divorce, but that doesn't mean your life has to stop. To help you figure out how to cope, *Choices* asked Brette Sember, an attorney and the author of *How to Parent with Your Ex*, for tips on how to manage your feelings.

*** Realize that your thoughts and emotions are valid.** Be honest with yourself about how you feel, and accept it. Most important, try not to feel guilty, because you've done nothing wrong. Know that nothing you did caused their divorce, and there was nothing you could have done to prevent it.

*** Find balance in your life.** See friends and participate in activities that you enjoy. It is also important to maintain a relationship with the parent with whom you spend less time. Try combining the two! Ask your dad to come to your soccer game, or invite friends to his house when you're there on a weekend. If your parents are comfortable attending events together, encourage them to do that. If they aren't, suggest that they not sit together, and see if that will allow them both to go.

*** Talk to your parents about how you feel.** If things aren't working out, tell them. Make suggestions. Get them involved in your life and in your feelings. They want you to be happy and will most likely make a change if you tell them you need it.

*** Don't get caught in the middle.** If your parents are fighting, the best thing you can do is walk away. If one of them tries to talk to you about how horrible the other parent is, say that you don't want to take sides. Above all, make sure they know that you love them both equally.

*** Know that your parents' mistakes are not an indicator of what will happen to you.** It's hard to not worry about your own capability to have a solid relationship with another person in the future. But it's important for you to realize that as much as your parents' lives are imprinted on you, you can also learn from their mistakes. Always remember that it's possible to go on to have a happy marriage of your own.



test YOURSELF

Are the statements below true or false? Answers are in the Teacher's Edition.

1 Accepting that her parents' marriage is over has helped Taryn accept the divorce and move ahead with her life.

True **False**

2 Because of her parents' divorce, Taryn says she never wants to get married.

True **False**

3 Even though she and her mother visit each other, Taryn sometimes has difficulty viewing her mom as being a parent to her.

True **False**

4 When dealing with divorced parents, it is important to not get directly involved in any disputes between your mom and dad.

True **False**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 Taryn refers to her father as being both her mom and her dad. What do you think she means by this?

2 How much do you think Taryn's mom's problems with alcohol contributed to the divorce? What is it about abusing substances that can harm family relationships?