Father–Daughter Relationships

Contemporary Research and Issues

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
Textbooks in Family Studies Series

The Textbooks in Family Studies Series is an interdisciplinary series that offers cutting edge textbooks in family studies and family psychology. Volumes can be complete textbooks and/or supplementary texts for the undergraduate and/or graduate markets. Both authored and edited volumes are welcome. Please contact the series editor, Robert Milardo, at rhd360@maine.edu for details in preparing a proposal that should include the goal of the book, table of contents, an overview of competing texts, the intended market including course name(s) and level, and suggested reviewers.

These are the books currently in the series:


Father–Daughter Relationships

Contemporary Research and Issues

Linda Nielsen

Wake Forest University

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Author</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slippery Slopes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers, Facts, and Fictions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Myths Matter: Misperceiving and Stereotyping</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Portrayals of Fathers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myths and Misconceptions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers’ and Mothers’ Stress Levels</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Abusive Husbands</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathering and Fatherhood</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are Fathers Necessary?</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring Fathers in Research and Practice</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathering: Defining and Redefining the Role</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paternity Leave Policies</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Work Preferences</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Is Good Fathering?</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters’ Positive Impact on Fathers</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters’ Negative Impact on Fathers</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How and Why Fathers Matter</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Development</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Development</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Development</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity and Individuation</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Identity Formation 82
Athletic Development 84
Social Development 85
Sexual Behavior 89
Depression and Anxiety Disorders 92
Eating Disorders 93
Conclusion 97
References 100

Chapter 5  The Mother’s Impact 105
Closeness and Communication 106
Idealizing Mothers 109
Psychoanalytic Theories 112
Attachment Theories 115
Neurobiological and Evolutionary Theory 117
Maternal Gatekeeping 124
The Coparenting Relationship 126
Marital Happiness 128
Conclusion 131
References 134

Chapter 6  Divorced Fathers and Their Daughters 139
Whose Boots Do the Walking? 141
Daughters at Highest Risk 143
Long-Term Impact of Divorce 144
Father–Daughter Time After Divorce 145
Time and Relationship Quality 147
The Impact of Too Little Fathering 149
Sons Versus Daughters 150
Single Fathers Raising Daughters 151
Financial Matters 165
Remarriage 170
The Legal System 174
Conclusion 176
References 181

Chapter 7  Fathers and Daughters in Racial and Ethnic Minorities 191
America’s Fragile Families 193
Characteristics of Unmarried Fathers 198
Contents

Poverty and Fathering 201
Myths About Low-Income Fathers 202
African American Fathers and Daughters 204
Immigrant Fathers and Daughters 208
Hispanic American Fathers and Daughters 213
Asian American Fathers and Daughters 221
Biracial and Multiracial Daughters 224
Conclusion 225
References 228

Chapter 8 Difficult and Challenging Relationships 235
Incarcerated Fathers 236
Physically Abusive Fathers 240
Sexually Abusive Fathers 242
Alcoholic Fathers 245
Gay Fathers 248
Lesbian Daughters 253
Daughters of Sperm Donors 256
Adoptive Fathers 258
Stepfathers 260
Military Fathers 261
Father’s Early Death 263
Elderly Fathers and Their Daughters 266
Conclusion 269
References 272

Epilogue 277

Index 281
Foreword

Father–Daughter Relationships: Contemporary Research and Issues is one of the inaugural volumes in the Textbooks in Family Studies Series. Our purpose is to pair leading scholars with core topics in the field of family studies that are surprisingly underrepresented. These scholars are active researchers, practitioners, and talented teachers who can write engaging textbooks for use in the classroom either as standalone texts or paired with additional volumes.

Parenting and parent–child relationships are prominent topics of inquiry in family studies and perhaps among the most frequently addressed. This would not be surprising or particularly notable if it were not for the more obvious quirks. The field is largely dominated by talk about mothering, the contributions of mothers, and often the contested relationships between mothers and daughters. The contributions of fathers receive far less attention and, in some ways, we know little about what they actually do with children. While discussing the issue and apparent bias with my colleague Renate Klein, she replied swiftly and without pause: “The contribution of fathers is largely economic, when they are present.” There is a good reason that the field has focused largely on mothers and mothering: Women do the lion’s share of child care. But there are exceptions, and lots of them: Men who contribute to childcare in ways both large and small. This book uncovers the nuance of exceptions. No doubt on average fathers and daughters are less communicative, less engaged, and less intimate than mothers and daughters. The relationships of fathers and daughters are consequently more unstable and fragile. The same issues pertain to relationships among fathers and sons. This simple narrative on parenting and the relative contributions of mothers and fathers is all true, but it hardly tells much of a story. Active fathers and active father–daughter relationships are a minority, but they comprise a story worth dwelling on.

While recognizing the family work of mothers, Professor Nielsen asks some very pointed questions: What do fathers do and how do we distinguish grades of quality fathering? How are fathers central in the personal development of their daughters, and, just as importantly, how do daughters influence the development, beliefs, and well-being of fathers? While bringing to bear
over two decades of experience in teaching classes on father–daughter relationships, Professor Nielsen applies a critical analysis to contemporary research. She takes controversial positions regarding the contributions of fathers in household labor, child care, and the emotion work performed in grounding and maintaining close ties with daughters. She builds an understanding of how fathering and father–daughter relationships matter.

Robert M. Milardo, PhD
Professor of Family Studies
Series Editor
University of Maine
Preface

Why devote an entire book to father–daughter relationships in America today? The most obvious reason is that social scientists, educators, and mental health professionals have paid much less attention to fathers and daughters than to mothers and daughters. Less obvious to many people is the fact that the quality of father–daughter relationships has far-reaching effects in society. Poorly fathered girls are generally plagued with a host of problems throughout their lives—problems that too often have a negative impact on their children as well. Moreover, the father–daughter relationship has an impact on fathers, both in terms of his well-being and development.

In our society father–daughter relationships have been treated much like the light inside the refrigerator: “there,” yet rarely on our minds except when we open the door in search of food or when the bulb burns out. But the topic merits our attention for reasons other than having been marginalized for too long: It matters because father–daughter relationships are generally less communicative, less relaxed, and less emotionally intimate than mother–daughter relationships. They are also more fragile and unstable, for reasons that will be discussed throughout this book. In other words, all is not well. Something is lacking. If this had no impact on daughters or on fathers, we might as well shrug our shoulders and say, “So what?” But the reality is that the quality of the father–daughter relationship does have an impact—a considerable and long-lasting one—not only on the daughter, but on her father. Moreover, the quality of their relationship is associated with many of the most troubling problems in our country today, including poverty, teenage pregnancy and sexual disease, out-of-wedlock births, drug and alcohol abuse, high rates of incarceration, and a host of other problems disproportionately afflicting minority families. In other words, strengthening father–daughter relationships has far-reaching benefits.

Audience

This book is intended as a supplementary text for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses. The book is especially
relevant for courses such as Sociology of the Family, Child or Adolescent Psychology, Parenting and Child Development, Family Counseling, Racial and Ethnic Families, and Women’s and Gender Issues. This book will enhance the readers’ effectiveness in their future careers working with families from diverse backgrounds. It is also intended for professionals in mental health, social work, and family court jobs. By familiarizing its readers with the most recent research and controversies, this book will expand their expertise and enhance their work with families. Finally, this book is intended for people who want to gain more insight into their own father–daughter relationships or who want to help others strengthen or rebuild their father–daughter relationships. This text is not an advice book for improving or resurrecting relationships, as was my last book, *Between Fathers and Daughters*. Nevertheless, the true stories and questionnaires in each chapter provide specific, practical ideas for improving father–daughter relationships.

Finally, keep in mind that this book is just as relevant for male readers as it is for females. Male students, social workers, and mental health professionals can be more effective in their work with family members by having a thorough understanding of father–daughter relationships. In their personal lives, most men are—or eventually will be—in romantic relationships with women. Whether either partner is aware of it or not, their relationship or marriage will be affected by the kind of relationship the woman had with her father. Then, too, most men are—or eventually will be—fathers, and more than half of their children will be daughters. In other words, men as well as women can benefit from a better understanding of father–daughter relationships.

## Distinctive Features of the Book

Having taught university courses for nearly 35 years—21 of which were spent teaching my Fathers and Daughters course—I designed this book with teachers in mind. I wanted this to be a book that students and instructors would find intriguing and engaging—a book filled with recent research that many have not encountered in other texts. The book is intended to be one of several required textbooks around which a social science, social work, or counseling course is designed. I also hope the book will
inspire instructors to create a Fathers and Daughters course at their own schools.

My primary goal is to provoke students: To provoke them into re-examining many of their most dearly held assumptions, to provoke them into discussing controversial ideas, and to provoke them into recognizing the myths and misconceptions that limit so many father–daughter relationships. My other goal is to show students how to interpret the research and approach controversial issues more analytically, objectively, and critically—in short, how not to be so easily duped. I point out the shortcomings in the research, the complex questions that remain unanswered, and the common mistakes we all make in allowing our own preconceptions and emotions to override logic.

To accomplish these goals, I have included features that the students in my Fathers and Daughters course over the past two decades have found the most enticing and challenging. The research is brought to life with compelling examples and personal stories from fathers and daughters, including well-known celebrities and political leaders. Documentary, feature film, and website resources are included to make the research more relevant by showing its practical applications. On a more personal level, the boxed quizzes and questionnaires show students how research and controversial issues can apply to their own lives. Other boxed inserts provide insights into the relationships between real fathers and daughters—the well-known and the lesser-known from our nation’s past and present. At the end of each chapter is a list of provocative, unsettling, and controversial questions to engage the students’ imaginations and emotions. The bold-faced terms and study questions keep students focused on the most important concepts.

Overview of the Book

This book begins with an introductory chapter that provides a detailed overview of each chapter. Chapter 2 examines the myths and misconceptions that can weaken or limit father–daughter relationships in American society today. Chapter 3 considers how father–daughter relationships are often ignored or marginalized and how we can redress the situation. The chapter then explores the behaviors and attitudes that constitute “good” fathering. The chapter concludes by addressing an equally compelling, yet often
ignored question: How does a daughter influence her father’s development, his beliefs, his marriage, and his overall well-being?

At the heart of Chapter 4 is this essential question: How and why do fathers matter? How do they affect their daughters’ social, academic, intellectual, athletic, and psychological development? This chapter also explains the various theoretical perspectives on fathers and daughters. How do psychoanalytic theorists, social learning theorists, attachment theorists, and family systems theorists view father–daughter relationships?

The remaining chapters address this question: Which situations and factors weaken and sometimes destroy father–daughter relationships, and which strengthen them? Two of the most important factors, mothers and divorce, are explored in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition to mothers and divorce, race and ethnicity have an impact on father–daughter relationships. Chapter 7 focuses on the 40% of fathers and daughters who are members of America’s racial or ethnic minorities. Chapter 8 presents an array of destructive, difficult, and challenging situations that affect fathers and daughters in all racial and ethnic groups. The book concludes with an epilogue.

Acknowledgments

This book has been shepherded along the way by a number of dedicated and talented reviewers whose excellent suggestions greatly enhanced the book: Brian P. Misciadrelli at the State University of New York, Harry Freeman at the University of South Dakota, William Marsiglio at the University of Florida, Mark Fine at the University of Missouri, Robert Emery at the University of Virginia, Michael Lamb at the University of Cambridge, and three anonymous reviewers. Above all I appreciate the insight, advice, and wry humor of Bob Milardo, editor of the Textbooks in Family Studies Series, who critiqued my entire manuscript. And, needless to say, without the enthusiastic support of Debra Riegert, senior editor at Routledge/Taylor & Francis, this book never would have come to fruition.

Linda Nielsen, EdD
Wake Forest University
Dr. Linda Nielsen is a professor of adolescent and educational psychology at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. A member of the faculty for 35 years, she is a nationally recognized expert on father–daughter relationships. Since 1990 Nielsen has taught the only college course in the country devoted exclusively to the study of father–daughter relationships. Her work has been featured in a PBS documentary, on National Public Radio, and in dozens of magazines and newspapers. In addition to her many scholarly articles, she has written a college textbook, Adolescence: A Contemporary View, and a guide, How to Motivate Adolescents: A Guide for Parents and Teachers, as well as two books on ways to improve father–daughter relationships, Embracing Your Father and Between Fathers and Daughters: Enriching or Rebuilding Your Adult Relationship. More information on her work is available on her website, www.wfu.edu/~nielsen.
Chapter 6

Divorced Fathers and Their Daughters

Daughters are now more likely than ever before not to spend the first 18 years of their lives living with their fathers. In the past, daughters who were separated from their fathers during childhood typically had fathers who had died, had abandoned the family, or had been forced to live away from home to earn money for the family (Griswold, 1993). But in 2009, for the first time in U.S. history, 40% of the children were born out of wedlock, surpassing the 35% whose parents are divorced (Census Bureau, 2010). Nearly one third of our nation’s daughters experience their parents’ divorce before the age of 9—and 40% before the age of 18 (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008). This adds up to about 550,000 daughters a year. As you can see from the sobering statistics in Box 6.1, a daughter is as likely to be living with a divorced mother as with a mother who has never been married. More startling still, the typical father–daughter relationship today is not occurring in a family where the mother and father stay married to one another until all the children have grown up.

In this chapter, we will be examining a number of provocative and compelling questions. How do divorced father–daughter relationships differ from those in married families? Why is the daughter’s relationship with her father generally more damaged than the son’s? What are the factors working against their relationship? Which daughters are the most likely to experience their parents’ divorce? What can be done to prevent or to reduce the damage to these father–daughter relationships? But since the father–daughter relationship is affected by the circumstances surrounding the divorce, we begin with these three questions: Why do
most parents divorce? Who usually initiates the divorce? How do mothers and fathers tend to react differently to their divorce?

Having an overview of what generally happens between a daughter’s father and mother during their divorce helps us understand some of the dynamics affecting the father–daughter relationship thereafter. Understandably, daughters can jump to some wildly incorrect assumptions about their own parents’ divorce based on what they have seen or heard in the media about American divorces. Many of those false assumptions are reflected in the statements in Box 6.2. The true statements in the quiz are 5, 6, 7, and 8. So let’s look carefully now at the research related to the statements in the quiz.

**BOX 6.1 AMERICAN FAMILIES**

Who are the 83 million children under the age of 18 living with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Family Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51%</td>
<td>Married mother and father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Unmarried mother and father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>Mother and stepfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12%</td>
<td>Single mother, divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>Single mother, never married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Neither parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Mother and her boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Single father, never married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Single father, divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Father and stepmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>Father and his girlfriend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Census Bureau, *Single Parent Households*, Washington, DC, Department of Labor, 2007.

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
Whose Boots Do the Walking?

“These boots are made for walkin’. And that’s just what they’ll do. One of these days these boots are going to walk all over you. Ready boots? Keep walkin’.” So go the lyrics of the old Nancy Sinatra song about a woman walking out on her unfaithful boyfriend. In one sense, the song is not far off the mark: In two thirds of all divorces, it is the mother’s “boots that do the walking.” Only one third of all divorces are initiated by men. In contrast to the song, however, the majority of women do not leave their marriages because their husbands have been unfaithful. Many get divorced because they are emotionally unsatisfied and unfulfilled, not because their husbands are abusive, alcoholic, drug addicted, dysfunctional, shiftless, cruel, mentally ill, or unfaithful (Demo & Fine, 2010; Rodrigues, Hall, & Fincham, 2006). This is not to say that two thirds of the divorces are caused by the wife. The person who pulls the trigger on a nearly dead marriage is not necessarily responsible for its death.
Given the tension and anger that financial issues cause after a divorce, a daughter might easily assume that money was a major reason why her parents’ marriage failed. Surprisingly, this is not generally the case. It is true that financial issues are a major source of stress in many marriages (Papp, Cummings, & Morey, 2009). For example, as their debts increase, the couple argues more and spends less time together (Dew, 2008). And when spendthrifts marry tightwads, the marriage is unhappier than when two spendthrifts or two tightwads marry each other (Rick & Finkel, 2009). But financial issues are not a leading cause of divorce (Andersen, 2009). For example, couples are more likely to get divorced when they have a child with serious behavioral problems (Osborne & McLanahan, 2007), have different religious faiths (Rivera, 2008), or continually demean and criticize one another (Rodrigues et al., 2006).

Many daughters might also assume that the divorce was caused by their father’s infidelity, a belief that inevitably damages the father–daughter relationship. In fact, however, even though 25%–50% of divorced couples admit that one or both of them committed adultery, most say this was not the reason for their divorce (Hall & Fincham, 2006). Nowadays, women and men are almost equally likely to cheat. For couples under the age of 35, roughly 20% of the husbands and 15% of the wives admit having been unfaithful (Atkins, 2008). In other surveys 55%–65% of both husbands and wives report having cheated, half of whom say they are happily married (Atwood & Schwartz, 2002). Some surveys also suggest that women’s rates of adultery are increasing faster than men’s (Fisher, 2004).

Regardless of why the marriage ends, the mother is more likely than the father to have been preparing emotionally for the divorce long before it occurs. Part of this preparation is confiding in friends and creating a supportive network to help her through the divorce. In contrast, the father is often minimizing or ignoring their marital problems. Indeed, many men are caught off-guard when their wives announce that the marriage is over. Not surprisingly then, a mother is more likely than the father to say she has experienced personal growth in the divorce process (Duck & Wood, 2006). Then too, the person who is unhappiest in the marriage usually adjusts more quickly to the divorce than their ex-spouse (Kalmijn & Monden, 2006). In the end, a daughter’s father is more likely than her mother to feel “dumped” and to
have a harder time adapting to the divorce (Demo & Fine, 2010). Regardless of these realities, daughters are more likely to blame their fathers than their mothers for the divorce (Butler, 2003; Harvey & Fine, 2010; Jennings & Howe, 2001).

Overall then, most divorces end for reasons other than money, adultery, or severe problems such as physical violence or drug and alcohol addictions. Since most daughters are too young when their parents separate to understand these adult dynamics, the ground is ripe for the growth of many misunderstandings and misconceptions that can damage the father–daughter relationship, as we will see in the remainder of this chapter.

### Daughters at Highest Risk

How likely is it that a daughter will have divorced parents? Slightly less than half of all the couples who once said “I do,” eventually say “I don’t.” Fortunately, the rates have been falling in the last decade, though part of this decline is because more people are having children without getting married (Demo & Fine, 2010). But the likelihood of a daughter’s parents getting divorced depends on a number of factors, including race, ethnicity, education, income, and age. How old were they when they got married and had their first child? Did they have children out of wedlock before they got married?

Given these variables, African and Hispanic American daughters are two to three times more likely than White daughters to have divorced parents. Regardless of race, if her parents never finished high school (in which case they also have very low incomes and generally had children before marrying), their divorce rate rockets to 60%. If the daughter is Hispanic American, her parents’ divorce rate depends on their country of origin. For example, if her parents are Puerto Rican, they are twice as likely to be divorced as Mexican American parents. In contrast, if her parents are college educated, which generally means they did not marry until their late 20s, their divorce rate is less than 20%. But even with college-educated parents, African American daughters are the most likely to have divorced parents and Asian American daughters the least likely (Demo & Fine, 2010).
What about interracial marriages? Are biracial daughters more likely to have divorced parents? Yes, but again, it depends. Only 5% of Americans are married to someone from another ethnic or racial group. Whites, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are the most likely to intermarry. In contrast, a daughter is very unlikely to have an African American and a White parent because only 2% of Black women and only 6% of Black men marry outside their race. As for divorce, certain mixed marriages are more likely to end in divorce than others. For example, if her mother is White and her father is African American or Asian American, they are more likely to divorce than same race couples. In contrast, if her father is White and her mother is any other race, their divorce rate is no higher than for White couples (Bratter & King, 2008).

In sum then, those parents who are least likely to get divorced have college educations and, as a consequence, good incomes. They tend to wait longer than less educated parents to have children and are generally married several years before becoming parents.

Long-Term Impact of Divorce

Although their parents’ divorce is a painful, stressful, unsettling experience for almost all daughters, the long-term impact is generally less severe than might be assumed. Overall, 70%–80% of these daughters grow up to be as successful and as well adapted as those with married parents from similar educational and economic backgrounds. Nonetheless, these daughters are two to three times more likely to have problems in regard to depression, aggression, delinquency, teenage pregnancy, school failure, academic underachievement, vocational success, intimacy and trust issues, drug and alcohol abuse, stress-related illnesses, and their future marriages (Demo & Fine, 2010; Stewart & Brentano, 2006).

Moreover, there is considerable variability in how divorce affects daughters—even daughters in the same family. For instance, one sister may suffer serious long-term consequences, while the other sister may seem to have escaped unscathed. Then too, divorce does not have an equal impact on all aspects of a child’s life. For instance, a daughter might continue to excel in school, but may become depressed or have trouble relating to boys. The nature and the extent of the damage depends on a host of intertwining variables: family income; the quality of the relationship with the
father; the residential parent’s parenting skills; the child’s gender, age, temperament, maturity and resilience; the nature and extent of parental conflict; each parent’s adjustment to the divorce; stepfamily relationships; extended family support; and family dynamics before the parents divorced (Demo & Fine, 2010; Stewart & Brentano, 2006).

Overall then, the differences between daughters with divorced or married parents are relatively small, if their socioeconomic levels are similar. Still, daughters of divorced parents are more likely to develop academic, behavioral, or emotional problems than those with married parents. More important still, the one aspect of a daughter’s life that is almost always damaged by the divorce is her relationship with her father. Moreover, her relationship is usually more damaged than the son’s. So regardless of how successful or well adapted she may be in other areas of her life, the daughter generally pays this ongoing price for her parents’ divorce: a weakened or severed relationship with her father.

Father–Daughter Time After Divorce

How much time are most fathers spending with their children after a divorce? Unfortunately, not much. Roughly 75%–85% of children live almost exclusively with their mothers, spending only every other weekend—at most—with their fathers. Up until recent years, only 5% to 7% of children have lived in shared parenting families, meaning they spend from 30% to 50% of the time living with their father after the divorce (Child Trends, 2002; Kelly, 2007). The good news is that the number of children who saw their father weekly rose from 18% to 31% between 1976 and 2002. But the bad news is that one third of the children have not seen their father at all in the past year (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009). It has been noted that fathers are probably spending somewhat more time than this with their children because mothers tend to underreport the amount of contact (Andersen, 2009). Still, most fathers and daughters spend very little time together after the divorce.

The question then is why? Why are most fathers spending so little time with their daughters? Although the reasons vary from family to family, three variables generally emerge as the most important (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Kruk, 2010; Stewart
First, divorced fathers are more likely than married fathers to have psychological, behavioral, and financial problems that may have weakened their relationships with their children before the divorce. These fathers’ problems include poor communication, anger management issues, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, aggression, violence, and personality disorders. Making low incomes, often being unemployed, or frequently having to move from one low-paying job to another can further undermine the father’s relationship with his children. Divorced fathers are also more likely to have had children at a younger age than fathers who remain married. Taken together, these factors help explain why some fathers are less involved and less committed to their children during the marriage, as well as after their divorce.

Second, many fathers feel discouraged because they are not given anywhere near equal residential custody or equal legal custody. Most fathers are only given 15%–20% of the parenting time on alternate weekends. And one third of fathers are not granted joint legal custody. Joint legal custody means that both parents have an equal say, by law, in the decision making and equal access to information regarding their children’s education, religious upbringing, or medical records. So, for example, without joint legal custody, the father cannot have a say in whether his daughter attends a religious school or what type of medical treatment she should receive, even in a life-threatening situation. Given these legal restrictions, many fathers say they cannot be “real” fathers anymore. Being legally disenfranchised and physically marginalized, the father often feels demoted to a “Disneyland Dad” and, as a consequence, slowly withdraws from his daughter’s life.

Third, many divorced fathers feel that the mothers’ gatekeeping eventually makes it too difficult to maintain a meaningful relationship with the children (DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Trinder, 2008). Feeling discouraged and disheartened, unwanted and unnecessary, many fathers feel they have little chance to be the fathers they once were. Many feel there is no option but to retreat to the margins of their daughters’ lives (Bailey & Zvonkovic, 2006; Baum, 2006; Frieman, 2007; Hallman & Deinhart, 2007; Hawthorne & Lennings, 2008; Leite & McHenry, 2006; Stone & Dudley, 2006).

To review the research that has been presented in this section, take the quiz in Box 6.3. The true statements are 5, 6, 7, and 10. The rest are false.
Given how little time most fathers and daughters spend together after the divorce, a number of questions arise: How much impact does the divorce have on their relationship? How long-lasting is this impact? How does having too little or no fathering influence the daughter? How much time is enough to maintain a meaningful relationship? And what might be done to limit the damage to their relationship?

The amount of time that fathers spend with their children after the divorce is related to the quality of their relationship from there on. Back in the 1980s, researchers were already discovering that children and nonresident fathers who spent the most time together had closer, more meaningful relationships, especially when that time was not just spent “having fun” together.
Father-Daughter Relationships: Contemporary Research and Issues

(Amato & Gilreth, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Whiteside & Becker, 2000). More recent research confirms that fathers need enough time with their children to be engaged in a wide range of activities and to do authoritative parenting (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Schenck, 2010). For example, the amount of time that young adults spent during adolescence with their divorced fathers was the strongest predictor of how close they presently felt to him. But because they had spent so little time together, only one third of them felt close enough to him to talk about anything personal or to seek his advice on any major decision (Aquilino, 2010).

Unfortunately, most daughters spend too little time with their fathers to maintain a meaningful relationship. Understandably then, the greatest price that most daughters feel they have paid for their parents’ divorce is the damaged or lost relationship with their father. In college surveys, the overwhelming majority of daughters wish their fathers had spent more time with them after the divorce and still long for a closer relationship with him. Many still wonder if their father even loves them (Emery, 2004; Finley & Schwartz, 2007; Harvey & Fine, 2010). It is especially worth noting that having a meaningful relationship with their father as young adults was not related to his income, but was related to how much time they had spent together after the divorce. In other words, fathering time trumps money (Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008).

But can a father who has spent very little time with his daughter rebuild his relationship with her later in life? Can’t most fathers make up for lost time? Unfortunately, this rarely seems to be the case. Young adults who claim they want a closer relationship with their father nonetheless say they have spent too little time together since the divorce to feel comfortable talking to him now about personal things. Their relationships are usually awkward and superficial because they know so little about one another (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). Likewise, other college students have said that even though their fathers now want to spend time with them, it is “just too late” (Harvey & Fine, 2010). Many daughters feel too many years have passed and too much damage has been done to create a meaningful relationship at this point in their adult lives.

What are the most important messages from this research? First, most fathers are spending far too little time with their daughters after a divorce, which creates a “father hunger” that lasts...
long into her adult years. Second, most fathers say they eventually withdrew from their daughters’ lives because they felt pushed out by the legal system, by the mother’s behavior, and by how our society treats divorced fathers. Third, even though most daughters do not suffer serious long-term damage from their parents’ divorce, most do suffer lifelong damage to their father–daughter relationship—damage that is difficult to repair after many years’ absence. Finally, African American and Hispanic American daughters are at highest risk for incurring this damage given their parents’ higher divorce rates.

The Impact of Too Little Fathering

After their parents’ divorce, most daughters pay an ongoing price because they receive too little—or no—fathering. As teenagers, these daughters are more likely to have babies out of wedlock, to have sex at an early age, and to be sexually promiscuous (Jeynes, 2001). Their teenage pregnancy rates are almost three times higher, and their chances of having sex at an early age are four times higher (Quinlan, 2007). Looking at the two countries with the highest teen pregnancy rates, 10% of girls in the United States and 7% in New Zealand become pregnant every year—and half of them have their babies. Daughters who have not lived with their fathers since early childhood are seven to eight times more likely to become pregnant as teenagers, while those who lived with their fathers until later childhood are only two to three times more at risk. Even after family income, their mother’s age, and parental supervision were factored in, father-absent girls still had the highest rates of pregnancy (Ellis, Bates, & Dodge, 2003).

These “underfathered” daughters are also more apt to make bad grades, drop out of high school, and never make it to college (Chadwick, 2002; Krohn & Bogan, 2001; Menning, 2006). They are more likely to break the law (Coley & Medeiros, 2007) and to have low self-confidence (Dunlop, Burns, & Bermingham, 2001). As teenagers, they are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol regardless of the parents’ incomes (Hoffmann, 2002; Lerner, 2004). As adolescents and as young adult women, they have more emotional and psychological problems and are more likely become depressed than daughters who maintained a close relationships with their fathers (Amato & Dorius, 2010; Carlson, 2006; King
& Soboleski, 2006; Stewart, 2003; Videon, 2002; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2009).

Having a strong relationship with her father also has health benefits for daughters. As teenagers, these girls are less likely to be obese or to be dangerously underweight (Menning & Stewart, 2008). They are less likely to develop eating disorders (Maine, 2004). As young girls, they enjoy better overall health (Troxel & Mathews, 2004). And as young adults, they have fewer stress-related illnesses such as insomnia, headaches, chest pains, and intestinal problems (Fabricius & Lueckcn, 2007).

Too little fathering also leads to more troubled, more unstable romantic relationships in the daughter’s life. In college, these daughters often have more trouble trusting and being emotionally intimate with men (Harvey & Fine, 2010; Kilmann, 2006). They have more difficulty communicating with their boyfriends, often fearing emotional intimacy (Morris & West, 2001; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). With men, they generally have more trouble negotiating, compromising, controlling their emotions, and defusing anger (Conway, Christensen, & Herlihy, 2003; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). These findings are not surprising since, as discussed in an earlier chapter, in married families the father generally has more impact than the mother on how daughters relate to men. Whether her parents are married or divorced, the daughter who has a fulfilling relationship with her dad is generally more trusting, more secure and more satisfied in her romantic relationships than the daughter with a troubled or distant relationship with her father (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Compared to sons, daughters of divorced parents are often less trusting and less satisfied with their romantic relationships (Jacquet & Surra, 2001), and have poorer communications skills in intimate relationships (Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). When engaged to be married, a daughter is more likely than a son to believe the marriage might fail (Whitton, 2008).

Sons Versus Daughters

Moreover, daughters are more likely than sons to feel rejected and unloved by their father after the divorce. For example, in a 20-year study with almost 175 children, three times as many daughters as sons felt their relationship with their dad had deteriorated after the divorce (Ahrons, 2007). Similarly, in a 30-year
study involving nearly 2,500 children, daughters’ relationships with their dads were more damaged than sons’ (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Among teenagers with divorced parents, girls generally reported worse relationships with their fathers (Stamps, Booth, & King, 2009). Teenage girls also felt more unloved and angrier at their fathers than the boys in families where the mother bad-mouthed the father (Koerner, 2004). College daughters were less likely than the sons to believe that their fathers wanted to spend time with them (Fabricius, 2003), to feel satisfied with the amount of time they had together (Finley & Schwartz, 2007), and to be content with their current relationship (Harvey & Fine, 2010b; Frank, 2004; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). Even years after their parents’ divorce, adult daughters were less likely than the sons to improve their relationship with their fathers (Scott, Booth, & King, 2007). In short, the father–daughter relationship generally takes a greater hit than the father–son relationship.

Single Fathers Raising Daughters

Although rare, after a divorce some daughters end up living full time with their fathers. How do these daughters fare compared to those who live full time with their mothers? Several studies in the early 1980s concluded that children who lived with their same sex parent had better grades and fewer behavioral problems than those who lived with their opposite sex parent. But more recent studies fail to support this. In a national sample of more than 2,000 tenth graders, there were no significant differences in school achievement or in behavioral problems for sons or for daughters being raised by the same sex or the opposite sex parent. In fact, the daughters living with fathers who were very involved in their schools had higher achievement scores than sons or daughters living with their mothers or sons living with their fathers. The researchers hypothesized that these fathers were doing a better job than the mothers maintaining parental authority with their daughters. That is, the mothers were more inclined to become friends with their sons and their daughters in ways that undermined their authority. Fathers, however, were only inclined to abdicate their authority with their sons (Lee, Kushner, & Cho, 2007). An older nationally representative study also found that sons and daughters were no better or worse off living with the same sex or the opposite sex parent in terms of academic achievement,
deviant behavior, peer relationships, parental involvement, and self-esteem (Powell & Downey, 1997).

**Shared Parenting Families**

While there is little argument that most daughters would benefit from spending more time with their fathers after the parents’ divorce, there is considerable controversy over how much time fathers and daughters need together in order to preserve their relationship. Should the daughter live exclusively with her mother? If not, how much overnight time should she spend in her father’s home? Would she benefit most from living half the time with each parent? In discussing these issues, the terms *parenting plan* or *parental responsibility* are now preferred to the older term “custody.”

*Shared parenting, dual residence,* or *shared care* are the terms used to refer to families where the children live 35% to 50% time with each parent. Though only 7% to 10% of children who are now young adults were raised in shared parenting families, these families are on the increase. In the past 3 years, in Wisconsin, Washington State, and Arizona, 30% to 50% of the parents have opted for shared parenting (George, 2008; Melli & Brown, 2008; Venohr & Kaunelis, 2008). Public opinion polls also show that 85% to 90% of respondents, regardless of age, gender, or marital status, believe that children should live as equally as possible with both parents (Braver, Fabricius, & Ellman, 2008; Fathers and Families, 2004). Since fathers and daughters are increasingly likely to be living in shared care families, this research merits careful attention. As Box 6.4 illustrates, many popular beliefs about shared parenting are not supported by the research. The perfect score on the quiz is 8 because only these statements are true: 3, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, and 19.

Fortunately, data are now available from the first generation of children who have grown up in shared parenting families. This has enabled researchers to begin answering the question: What are the advantages and disadvantages of shared parenting compared to living almost exclusively with the mother and spending two weekends a month (or less) with the father? Since these young adults are no longer living with either parent, they are free to tell researchers candidly how they feel about the parenting plans that
**BOX 6.4  SHARED PARENTING AFTER DIVORCE**

Which of these statements is true for the majority of divorced parents in our country? Shared parenting means that children live with each parent at least one third of the time.

___ 1. Most mothers want shared parenting custody.
___ 2. Shared parenting can only work for well-educated, wealthy parents.
___ 3. Under current laws, shared parenting is difficult for fathers to obtain.
___ 4. Most young adults felt that living exclusively with their mother was in their best interests.
___ 5. Most children in shared parenting families feel unsettled and resentful.
___ 6. Most children in shared parenting end up living with their mother anyway.
___ 7. Most fathers fail at shared parenting.
___ 8. Children younger than 6 benefit from overnight time at their father’s home.
___ 9. The parents must be friends in order for shared parenting to work.
___ 10. Shared parenting requires parents to work closely together on a daily basis.
___ 11. Sole residence children are less well adjusted than those in shared parenting.
___ 12. Many fathers feel they have little chance of getting shared parenting custody.
___ 13. Shared parenting is the law in most states.
___ 14. Daughters benefit as much as sons from shared parenting.
___ 15. Most children want to live with their fathers more than four nights a month.
___ 16. If parents are in conflict, shared parenting cannot work.
___ 17. The legal system is sometimes biased against fathers who want shared parenting.
___ 18. Most judges are quite knowledgeable about child development.
___ 19. In some states, one third of the parents are choosing shared parenting.
___ 20. Fathers are generally satisfied with their custody arrangement.

___ Total marked “true”
their parents chose for them. Three overriding messages emerge in these studies: First, the fathers and the children who did not have shared parenting wanted more time living together, but most mothers opposed it. Second, the shared parenting children were better off on all measures of well-being and had stronger relationships with their fathers and their mothers. Third, the shared care children did not feel like “shuffled around suitcase kids with no home.” They believe shared parenting was in their best interests and would not have preferred to live with only one of their parents.

The feedback from young adults who grew up in shared parenting families is encouraging. At Arizona State University, data were gathered over three years from more than 900 students with divorced parents. Almost all (92%) of those who had lived in shared parenting families said this was the best parenting plan for them. In contrast, 70% of those who had lived with their mothers wished they had been allowed to live more time with their fathers. Most said their fathers also wanted more time, but their mothers would not agree to it. It is important to note that even those who lived with their fathers two weekends a month said this was not nearly enough time. The shared care children also had closer relationships with both parents. They did not wonder if their fathers loved them, as did many who had lived with their mothers. They also had fewer stress-related illnesses. More compelling still, the shared parenting advantages held true regardless of much or how little conflict there had been between their parents (Fabricius, 2003; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007).

Younger daughters and sons are also benefiting from shared care. In a 3-year study of 1,200 families in Wisconsin, the half who were in dual residence had better relationships with their fathers 3 years after the divorce. Only 20% of these fathers were spending less time with the children than 3 years previously, in contrast to 60% of the other fathers. Some of the shared parenting mothers even wished the fathers were less involved (Melli & Brown, 2008). In three separate studies involving almost 1,500 teenagers, those in shared parenting families were better off. They were as close to both parents as children with married parents; and the daughters were less depressed, less anxious, and less aggressive (Spruijt & Duindam, 2010). Even after controlling for the father’s education, the teenagers were less troubled in regard
to antisocial behavior, depression, self-esteem, and school conduct (Breivik & Olweus, 2006). They were generally less aggressive and less depressed (Campana, Henley, & Stolberg, 2008) and had fewer behavioral problems (Lee, 2002). More impressively, in a meta-analysis of 33 studies, children whose parents shared legal or residential custody were better off than those in sole mother custody on all measures of academic, social, and psychological well-being (Bauerman, 2002).

Even though the Stanford Custody Project is nearly 25 years old, it merits attention because it is often cited in the literature on shared parenting. The data were collected in 1984–1985 and included nearly 1,400 children, one fifth living in dual residence families. Four years after the divorce, the dual residence teenagers were the best academically, emotionally, and psychologically. Moving back and forth between homes also diminished over time because the parents agreed to have the children spend longer periods of time in each home. Even though one third of these mothers had initially objected to shared parenting, the children still benefited. Most of the children who moved back to live with their mothers were from the lowest-income families, who were not able to maintain two homes suitable for raising children (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992; Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996).

But what if a daughter’s parents are not very cooperative or have ongoing conflicts? Can these daughters benefit from shared parenting? With the exception of the 10% to 15% of divorced parents whose conflicts are physical or violent, shared care parents are not significantly more cooperative than other divorced parents. In fact, shared parenting couples tend to have more disagreements about child raising issues than other divorced parents because they are both actively engaged in the children’s lives. Many of these parents are not coparenting, which means having a friendly relationship in which the parents frequently communicate and carefully coordinate activities between their two homes. Most parents are parallel parenting, meaning they have a disengaged, businesslike relationship with only as much communication as is needed for the children’s well-being. Primarily what distinguishes shared parenting families from others is their strong commitment to having both parents actively involved in the children’s lives (Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996; Fabricius, 2003; Melli & Brown, 2008).
But is it actually the shared parenting that is benefiting these children? Maybe the more influential factors are the parents’ higher incomes and educational levels, or the absence of conflict and high levels of cooperation, or the motivation and dedication of these fathers. Even though this hypothesis can never be tested experimentally, there are at least four reasons to question its validity. First, it is true that shared care parents have tended to be better educated and have higher incomes (Kelly, 2007). In part this is because higher-income fathers can afford to hire lawyers who negotiate for shared parenting (Kelly & Johnson, 2005). However, the income and educational differences tend to be exaggerated. For example, in the large Wisconsin study discussed earlier, only one fourth of the shared parenting mothers and one third of the fathers had college degrees—the same as in the sole mother families. The shared care families were by no means rich. The fathers’ median incomes were $40,000, compared with $32,000 for the fathers without shared parenting. Contrary to expectations, in a recent Canadian study the mothers without high school degrees were the most likely to opt for shared parenting—perhaps because they wanted more child-free time to go back and finish school (Juby, Burdais, & Gratton, 2005). Even 25 years ago in the Stanford Custody study, the parents who chose shared care were not significantly more educated or richer than the other divorced parents (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992).

Second, we cannot automatically presume that shared care fathers are more highly motivated or more dedicated than most other divorced fathers (Fabricius et al., 2010; Frieman, 2007; Hallman & Deinhart, 2007; Kruk, 2011). To begin with, many fathers whose children live with the mother wanted shared parenting. Many could not afford lawyers to do legal battle for shared parenting. And even well-educated fathers with good incomes often have work schedules that make shared residential parenting unfeasible. In other words, many dedicated fathers with good incomes are only living with their children two weekends a month. Many did not voluntarily opt out of shared parenting. Nor has research demonstrated that the majority of these fathers are “inferior” to the shared parenting fathers in terms of their dedication, love, or skills as parents. Third, the few studies
that have considered the fathers’ incomes or educational levels have still found advantages for children in shared care families (Breivik & Olweus, 2006; Buchanan & Maccoby, 1996; Melli & Brown, 2008).

In summarizing the research on shared parenting, three messages stand out. First, the main factor that distinguishes shared parenting couples from other divorced parents is their mutual commitment to keeping the father actively involved in the children’s lives. They are not significantly richer or different in other ways from other divorced parents. Second, the overwhelming majority of fathers and daughters say they want more shared parenting, while mothers are more often against it. Third, the objections raised against shared parenting have not been supported by the research as long as the parents are not in the 10%–15% high-conflict group whose arguments often get violent or physical. Fourth, fathers and daughters are more likely to maintain a quality relationship when they live together more than a few days a month. Shared parenting allows fathers to be engaged in their daughters’ daily lives across a wide range of activities year round and throughout the school week, rather than time sliced and diced into small weekend parcels.

**Damage to the Father–Daughter Relationship: The Impact on Fathers**

The pain of a damaged or severed relationship can have a profound effect on fathers as well as on daughters, as the stories in Box 6.5 illustrate. The father’s suffering takes a physical as well as a psychological toll. After a divorce, fathers are more likely to resort to heavy drinking or drug use and to develop stress-related illnesses, largely as a result of being separated from their children and being marginalized as parents (Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006; Bailey & Zvonkovic, 2006; Hallman & Deinhart, 2007; Hilton & Frye, 2004). In contrast, divorced fathers who remain actively involved in their children’s lives are in better physical and emotional health (Bokker, Farley, & Denny, 2005; Baum, 2006; Stone & Dudley, 2006). It also appears that some grief-stricken fathers gradually stop spending time with their children because the experience is too wrenching (Spillman, Deschamps, & Crews, 2004). In other words, both fathers and mothers suffer
BOX 6.5 THE SUFFERING OF FATHERS

Fathers’ Comments

Burt, age 42: “My daughter lived with me for 5 years because she and her mom didn’t get along. But when she turned 16, she said she wanted to go live with her mother—just see me every other weekend. I was in shock. Of course I didn’t force her to keep living with me. But she seems to grow more and more distant. When I ask what’s wrong, she says “nothing.” Is there a point where I should stop seeing her until she starts treating me better?”

Adam, age 62: “I think I have forgiven myself for not being as good a father as I should have been. But then I fall apart and feel guilty all over again whenever I see fathers and daughters laughing together—or when I think of my daughter getting married without my being there. I long for the day when she will forgive me and answer my phone calls and letters.”

Wei Lin, age 44: “I know I made mistakes with my daughter after my divorce. I’ve tried to apologize. But she still returns the gifts I send for her children’s birthdays. I’m desperately searching for a tool kit to fix our relationship. But after all these years, even now as a grandfather, I don’t know how to stop the aching.”

Daughters’ Comments

Anna, age 18: “My dad is not used to talking about relationships. But we started talking about the divorce and one comment really cut straight to my heart. When we were discussing his dreams, he said he wonders if he will ever marry again. The expressive look on his face and tone of his voice showed me how much the divorce had really crushed him. For the first time I saw my dad as a man with a lonely heart. Yes, he is strong and independent and successful. But he is also weak and lonely and sad and insecure.”

Jada, age 19: “I asked him what had made him saddest after the divorce. I thought he would say it was when I ruined his 40th birthday by refusing to be there. Instead, he said the saddest thing was not being allowed to be part of my day-to-day life. I never thought it bothered him that I lived with Mom full-time. I was always under the impression that he never thought about me. I was also surprised that he still had wedding pictures of him and Mom. Mom has always given me the impression that Dad never cared about their life together.”

Rachel, age 17: “Finally allowing my dad to tell me his side of the divorce made me uncomfortable because I’ve tried so hard to maintain a positive image of my mother. After much thought, I’ve decided that it’s still possible for me to admire her even though I see how much suffering she caused him.”
after their divorce. But most of the father’s suffering comes from being separated from his children.

Obstacles and Damaging Situations

Why are most father–daughter relationships damaged or severed after the parents’ divorce? While no single factor can be held entirely responsible, a constellation of factors seems to work together to weaken their relationship: the quality of the father–child relationship during the marriage, our society’s attitudes and behavior toward divorced fathers, the mother’s attitudes and
behavior, financial issues, remarriage, and the legal system’s bias against fathers.

**Parent–Daughter Relationships Before Divorce**

For reasons already discussed in earlier chapters, daughters generally have a closer, more communicative relationship with their mother than with their father. Well before the divorce, most mothers and daughters are talking more about personal things than fathers and daughters. This is not to say the daughters love their mothers more than their fathers. But they generally have a more emotionally intimate, involved, self-disclosing relationship (Sprague, 1999; Way & Gillman, 2000). Consequently, at the time of the divorce, most father–daughter relationships are already more fragile or more emotionally distant.

After a divorce the daughter’s bond with her mother generally gets stronger while the bond with her father weakens. Adolescents with divorced parents are especially close to their mothers compared with those with married parents (Bulduc, 2005; Riggio, 2004). Most college and high school students generally do not feel as close to their fathers after the divorce as they did when their parents were married (Knox, Zusman, & DeCuzzi, 2004; Scott et al., 2007). Even when the parents wait until the children are adults to get divorced, the daughters spend far more time with their mother than with their father (Shapiro, 2003). Most young adults feel they have to help, protect, or take care of their mother even years after their parents’ divorce (Marquardt, 2005). Even when her parents reach old age, the daughter is generally much closer to her mother, especially if she never remarried (Amato & Dorius, 2010). For example, in a survey of almost ten thousand adults, 12% provided help to their divorced or widowed mother and 20% gave her money—three times as many as did these things for their divorced or widowed father (Lin, 2008). So in the parent–child arena, most fathers start out behind the mother at the time of their divorce, and fall further behind from there on.

Finally, there are those fathers who have not been committed to or bonded with their children throughout their marriage. For these fathers the divorce may be the final blow to an already distant, troubled relationship with their children. These fathers may use the divorce as their excuse for severing the ties—an ending that may bring relief to children whose fathers emotionally
abandoned them long before the parents’ separation (Demo & Fine, 2010).

**Societal Attitudes and Practices**

The relationship can be further weakened by how our society too often marginalizes or excludes the divorced father from his child’s life. For example, pediatricians often fail to include the father in matters related to his children’s health. Recognizing this, the American Academy of Pediatrics has urged doctors to make more effort to include fathers (Coleman & Garfield, 2004). Teachers, school counselors, and mental health practitioners also tend to direct most of their attention to mothers, further marginalizing fathers (Fagan & Hawkins, 2003; Friedman, 2004; Sieber, 2008). For example, in a survey with 220 therapists, only 20% of the divorced fathers were invited to participate in their children’s therapy, compared to 50% of the mothers (Duhig, Phares, & Birkeland, 2002). Fathers are also often ignored by social service agencies, which provide much support and free services for divorced mothers (Lee & Hunsley, 2006; Sieber, 2008). Being excluded or ignored in these ways makes it more difficult for fathers to stay actively engaged in their daughters’ lives.

**Mothers’ Attitudes and Behavior**

The quality of the father–daughter relationship also depends on how supportive the mother is and how well she keeps the daughter out of the marital issues. As the story in Box 6.6 illustrates,

---

**BOX 6.6  THE SUPPORTIVE MOTHER**

Louise, age 25: “One thing I really respect about my parents was their ability to make divorce, which is an innately painful process, as amicable as possible. They have always been very good about not complaining about one another or making us feel as if we are in the middle of anything. I’ve asked my mom questions about their marriage, and she’s been pretty honest in giving me her side of the story. When she talks about their marriage, she highlights characteristics of my dad she thinks will help me understand him better. For example, she told me about my dad’s concerns for me as a baby and how he did special things for me. Instead of making me feel we’re teaming up against Dad, her stories usually make me feel closer to him.”

---

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
mothers can be extremely supportive. Unfortunately, they can also behave in ways that damage the father–daughter bond. Among the most damaging behaviors are disclosing negative information about the father or limiting the father’s time through the custody plan, gatekeeping, and parental alienation. Again, there are fathers who refuse to be actively involved no matter how supportive the mother has been. And there are men who abandon their children despite the mother’s efforts. Many mothers are doing a stellar and commendable job keeping the father involved in the children’s lives. Others, however, are not.

**Damaging Disclosures**

Since during a marriage mothers are more accustomed than fathers to sharing personal information with their daughters, mothers must be especially careful after a divorce not to share information that might damage the father–daughter relationship. This means not disclosing information about the divorce or the father that might cast him in a bad light. It also means not discussing financial or personal issues that might lead the daughter to think less of her father. For example, if the mother feels the father exploited her financially or blames him for the divorce, she should not share those feelings with her daughter.

In the painful aftermath of divorce, mothers tend to disclose more damaging information to their daughters than to their sons. Since many children first hear about the divorce from their mother, she must be especially careful not to disclose damaging information in breaking the news to them (Western, Nelson, & Piercy, 2002). Compared with sons, daughters become more depressed and anxious and develop more stress-related illnesses when their mother discloses damaging information (Afifi & McManus, 2010). Young adult daughters (Frank, 2004) and teenage girls (Harper & Fine, 2006) are usually more stressed than sons by their divorced parents’ conflicts. Girls also tend to get more upset than boys when either parent is experiencing emotional or psychological problems (Bosco, 2003). In part, the daughter’s depression or stress may be linked to being enmeshed with her mother, a situation that undermines the father–daughter bond. **Enmeshment, parentification, and role reversals** mean that the daughter has taken on the burdensome adult responsibility of being her mother’s friend, protector, and advisor (Silverberg, 2004). As many of these adult daughters say in retrospect: “I was
more her mom than she was mine” (Mayseless, 2004). These enmeshed or parentified daughters are also at higher risk for developing eating disorders (Braithwaite, Toller, Durham, & Jones, 2008). While sons can also become enmeshed with their mothers, it usually happens to daughters (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Leudemann, 2006; Jurkovic, Thirkield, & Morrell, 2001). But the bottom line is that daughters are more likely than sons to align with their mothers against their fathers after the divorce (Koerner, 2004; Koerner, Kenyon, & Rankin, 2006).

**Sharing the Parenting**

The mother’s willingness to share the parenting also has a significant impact on the father–daughter bond. The mother can willingly and enthusiastically agree to share the legal and the residential parenting (joint custody). Or she can be unwilling or unenthusiastic about the daughter’s living in her father’s home more than a few nights a month. Even though shared residential parenting is becoming more popular, most mothers still prefer to have the children live exclusively with them. Given this preference, mothers are generally more satisfied than fathers with their custody agreement. Even though most fathers and children want more time living together, many mothers will not agree to this parenting plan (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Bonach, Sales, & Koeske, 2005; DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Kelly, 2007).

**Gatekeeping**

After divorce, many fathers say that gatekeeping is one of the main reasons their relationships with their children deteriorate (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Amato & Dorius, 2010; DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010; McBride et al., 2005; Sullivan, 2008). Whether or not the mother is actually gatekeeping, many fathers feel that their ex-wife is pushing them out of the children’s lives. And with this feeling, they become discouraged and tend to be less engaged with their children. As already discussed, gatekeepers inadvertently close the gate between the daughter and her father, relegating him to a second class parent. The mother who had a loving relationship with her own father or who sincerely believes that fathers are equally vital for the children’s well-being are the least likely to be gatekeepers (Cannon, 2008; Krampe & Newton, 2006; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2010; Titelman, 2007). A divorced woman is also less likely to be a
gatekeeper when her friends believe that part of being a “good” mother is to keep the father actively involved in the children’s lives after a divorce (Markham, Ganong, & Coleman, 2007).

Why are some mothers reluctant to share the parenting after their divorce? In part, this may happen because women tend to hold on to grudges longer than their ex-husbands (Bonach et al., 2005). For example, in a 20-year study with nearly 1,400 divorced families, the mothers harbored more resentment than the fathers—even the richer, college-educated mothers who continued to enjoy a high standard of living (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Women also tend to ruminate more about failed relationships and to stay angrier longer than men (Hilton & Frye, 2004; Duck & Wood, 2006). Then too, some mothers are still emotionally attached to their ex-husband or regret having divorced him (Sbarra & Emery, 2006). Understandably, emotions such as these can make it more difficult for a mother to agree to share the parenting after a divorce.

**Parental Alienation**

Carried to the extreme, a mother’s unwillingness to share the parenting can lead to **parental alienation**—a situation where the daughter chooses to end her relationship with her father altogether. Parental alienation affects roughly 11% to 15% of children, most of whom reject their fathers, though some reject their mothers (Fidler & Bala, 2010). Parental alienation means that a daughter who had a good relationship with her father up until the time of the divorce, slowly rejects him as a consequence of the mother’s behavior and attitudes. An international expert on parental alienation, the psychologist Richard Warshak compares the alienated parent to the planet Pluto. Until 2006 Pluto was considered one of the planets in our solar system. But astronomers then decided to demote Pluto, declaring it to be one of several insignificant minor planets. Like Pluto, an alienated parent is swiftly thrown out of the daughter’s family system. Not only does she subject her father to a barrage of criticism and rejection before ending all contact, she often rejects all of her relatives on his side of the family, including her grandparents. An alienated daughter refuses to see anything good about her father, despite tangible evidence to the contrary. For example, even though family pictures
show them happily together, she will steadfastly deny that they ever had a good relationship. She is irrationally and unjustifiably focused on his every flaw. She exaggerates his minor mistakes. With her mother’s encouragement and support, the daughter often drives her father into getting angry or withdrawing, which, in turn, reinforces her negative views of him. Often, these daughters are enmeshed with their mothers, aligned together against their mutual enemy, the father. Rather than helping her daughter recognize both the good and the bad in her father, the mother participates in demonizing him. As adults, these daughters not only pay the price of the lost relationship with their father, but they may also have problems in relationships with their peers and boyfriends: poor impulse control, unrealistic expectations, distorted perceptions of others, and lack of empathy. In other words, they tend to treat others as they treated their fathers (Baker, 2007).

In sum, the mother supports the father–daughter bond after divorce in four crucial ways. First, she does not disclose damaging information. Second, she agrees to a parenting plan (custody) that legally gives the father ample time with his daughter. Third, she is not a gatekeeper. And fourth, she does not promote or allow parental alienation.

**Financial Matters**

Again, the mother cannot be held wholly responsible for what happens to the father–daughter relationship after a divorce. Among the other damaging factors are issues related to money (Nielsen, 2006; Nielsen, 2011). For example, the daughter may feel that her father has been financially unfair to her mother, not being generous enough in the division of money or other assets after their divorce. Or the daughter may feel that her father is selfish or greedy because she believes he is spending too much money on himself and his new girlfriend, new wife, or new children. She may also feel resentful or jealous that he and his new family seem to be enjoying such a high standard of living, especially if they appear to be far more well off than her mother. If the daughter believes her father is being selfish financially—whether or not that is actually the case—her beliefs often create tension and ill-will between them.
College Finances

Indeed, financing the daughter’s college education creates tension between many divorced fathers and their daughters (Nielsen, 2006; Nielsen, 2011). The story in Box 6.7 of a daughter suing her divorced father over her college tuition is an extreme case (Nolan, 2010). Nevertheless it makes the point that financing a college education can create havoc for divorced fathers and their daughters. Even when the father has paid all of his child support, once his daughter turns 18 he is rarely required by law in the divorce agreement to continue giving her money. Nineteen states allow a judge to order parents to pay a portion of the college expenses, but only Alabama and Colorado require it. Understandably then, tensions often rise when financing the college education looms ahead on the horizon. Among these thorny issues are: How much money will each parent contribute to their daughter’s education? Should this depend on how much each earns or on the quality of the daughter’s relationship with each? Should a father be expected to pay if his

---

**BOX 6.7 DAUGHTER SUES FATHER FOR COLLEGE TUITION**

In 2007, Dana Soderberg went to court to force her father to reimburse her for tuition at Southern Connecticut State University. Her parents, Howard and Deborah Soderberg, divorced in 2004. They agreed that the father would pay for the educations of their three children. Subsequently, the daughter persuaded her father to sign a written contract obligating him to pay her college tuition until she was 25, as well as other expenses such as books and car insurance. As part of the agreement, she was supposed to apply for student loans, which her father would then repay. But when Dana started her senior year, her father refused to pay the bills. She procured a $20,000 loan cosigned by her mother and finished school. After graduating, she sued her father for breach of contract. Her father argued that she had violated the contract by not applying for loans, by not attending school full-time, and by not providing him with any receipts. He also claimed that she dropped courses and spent the refunded money on noneducational items. The judge ruled that the father had to pay $47,000 for Dana’s student loan, interest, attorney fees, and car insurance payments.

daughter has refused to spend much time with him since the parents got divorced? If a father agrees to help pay, does he have the right to have a say in what college she attends—for example, a less expensive state school versus an expensive private school?

A large nationally representative study of college students recently answered many of these intriguing questions (Turley & Desmond, 2010). Married parents contributed about 8% of their income ($4,700) each year to their child’s college education compared with 6% ($1,500) for divorced and 5% ($2,500) for remarried parents. The difference between married and divorced parents was largely explained by the fact that divorced parents earned only half as much as married parents. But even though the remarried and married parents had similar incomes, the remarried parents contributed $2,200 a year less. These findings are troubling given the fact that it is now harder than ever before for students to qualify for college loans. The researchers did not ask why the remarried parents contributed less. But since remarried parents usually have more children to send to college, they have less money available to contribute to each one. Then too, remarried fathers’ relationships with their children are generally more strained and more distant than married fathers’. Consequently, these fathers may feel less obligated and less motivated to pay for college educations.

Parents’ Financial Situations

The father–daughter relationship can also be strained if she believes her father has a much higher standard of living than her mother (Nielsen, 2008). She may blame—and thus resent—her father for this. Or she may align herself with her mother and distance herself from her father as a way of “compensating” her mother for being less well off financially. Moreover, the daughter may not have an accurate picture of what each parent’s financial situation actually is. For example, if her father lives in a bigger house than her mother or is the head of his own company, this does not necessarily mean he is any wealthier than her mother.

There is still an ongoing debate among researchers about how different most mothers’ and fathers’ financial situations are after their divorce. There is little disagreement that after a divorce mothers and children in lower-income families suffer far greater financial losses than in higher-income families. On the other hand, in these poor families, fathers often have a lower standard of
living than their ex-wives because they are not entitled to equivalent welfare benefits (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008). But in middle- and upper-income families, figuring out which parent is better off financially after a divorce is a complicated process. In order to make a fair assessment, researchers cannot merely compare the two parents’ incomes. Researchers must also consider each parent’s tax deductions, income tax brackets, home ownership, and additional child expenses such as health insurance. Taking all factors into account, in the largest federally funded study ever conducted, fathers were left with only $25 a month more than mothers (Braver et al., 2006). Similarly, others have found that men had a decline of about 8% in their standard of living after paying child support and taxes (McManus & DiPrete, 2001). It appears then that for many daughters there is not a large gap between the financial well-being of their parents after divorce.

Another financial issue that can strain the father–daughter relationship is child support. Despite the popularity of the belief that the majority of divorced men are “deadbeat dads” who have the money but refuse to pay child support, it is not true. Part of the reason for the confusion over men not paying child support is that the statistics are generally reported for all fathers, not just for divorced fathers. Fathers who have never been married to their children’s mother are included along with divorced fathers. But when the statistics are analyzed separately, a more positive picture of divorced fathers emerges. Though not an insignificant number, only 20% of divorced fathers fail to pay any child support. Nearly 55% pay in full, and another 30% pay almost all. On top of their child support, 45% pay their children’s health insurance, 40% voluntarily buy them clothes, 60% give gifts, 10% pay for child care or summer camps, and 20% pay for medical expenses beyond health insurance (Census Bureau, 2007a).

In contrast to divorced fathers, the majority of never-married fathers do not pay child support. Most of these fathers had children at an early age, are poorly educated, and are living in poverty. One fourth are too poor to pay any child support, and another third pay what they can when they have money. In families where the children receive no child support from their fathers, 8% of their mothers do not know who the father is, 15% have no idea where he is, and another 15% do not want him to have any contact with the children and, therefore, do not want child support money from him (Census Bureau, 2007a). Because most of these
mothers and fathers are so poorly educated and unskilled, only 20% of their children would be lifted out of poverty if these fathers paid child support (Comanor, 2004). Half of these fathers are high school dropouts making less than $5,000 a year, and only 10% of them have a full-time job (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008). Moreover, the poorer the father is, the higher the percentage of his income he is required to pay for child support. For example, in Washington State, fathers who earned less than $16,000 had to pay almost one third of their income for child support, while fathers who earned twice that much had to pay only 15% (Stirling & Aldrich, 2008). When poor fathers do pay child support, the mother may receive as little as $50 a month because the state government keeps most of it to help recoup some of the money the state has had to spend on welfare benefits (Eckholm, 2007). Given this, it has been argued that more low-income fathers would pay child support if they knew all of their money was going to their children (Turetsky, 2005).

Fathers who meet their child support obligations, as most divorced fathers do, are contributing more than just money to their daughters. They are contributing their time. Fathers who pay child support generally spend more time with their children than those who are not paying (Amato, Meyers, & Emery, 2009; Aquilino, 2010; Nepomnyaschy, 2007). Not surprisingly, these fathers are also more likely to voluntarily spend more money on other things that their daughters need, including college educations. There appears to be an interwoven pattern of events rather than a straightforward cause and effect relationship. That is, when the mother agrees to share legal custody and generously shares the parenting time, the father is more likely to spend time with the children which, in turn increases the odds of his paying child support. Simultaneously, his financial support may increase the mother’s willingness to grant him more time with the children and to work more cooperatively together in coparenting. Her cooperation, in turn, helps him maintain the bond with his children and increases the chances of his continuing to help the children financially later in their lives.

In sum, financial issues matter because they generally affect the quality of the father–daughter relationship. Their bond is more likely to remain strong when the father pays child support and has treated her mother fairly in their financial settlement, and when both parents have roughly the same standard of living.
Father–Daughter Relationships: Contemporary Research and Issues

Remarriage

In addition to the “M and Ms” (mothers and money), the father’s getting remarried has an impact on his relationship with his daughter. When fathers remarry, their relationships with their daughters tend to become more complicated and more strained, as the stories in Box 6.8 illustrate (Nielsen, 2008). In part, this happens because fathers generally remarry before their ex-wives do. From the standpoint of his relationship with his daughter, he generally has the misfortune of having to “go first” into blended family living. Although 85% of parents do remarry, usually within 3 years of their divorce, the father usually remarries first. Higher-income parents are more likely to remarry than low-income parents. And Whites are more likely to remarry than African Americans (Teachman, Tedrow, & Hall, 2006). Unfortunately, second marriages are 5% more likely than the first marriage to

BOX 6.8 FATHERS, DAUGHTERS, AND STEPMOTHERS

Suzanne, age 30: “Currently, I’m struggling with dad’s just having gotten married. I feel he has his own life now and I’m not part of it. When I told him how I felt, he explained that he has always focused his life on us girls. And now that we’re in our 20s, he wants to focus on creating a fulfilling relationship with his wife. I realized too that this is the first time I’ve seen the romantic side of him. He was never like this with my mom. He showed me the video of his recent marriage and said how sad he was that I refused to attend. That made me feel pretty bad about myself.”

Alice, age 35: “I appreciate the fact that my dad’s wife never tried to act like a mother to me. I’m too old for that, and it would have made things worse. She gives me and Dad time to ourselves without her always being there. This has helped strengthen my relationship with him.”

Josh, age 60: “My 30-year-old daughter wants me to drive into the city to take her to dinner or take her shopping several times a month. But she refuses to come to my home or to call on the home phone because she doesn’t want anything to do with my wife. Should I lay down the law and insist she spend time with me and my wife?”

Samuel, age 46: “Now that I’ve remarried, I’m more relaxed with my daughter because I’m a happier man. I’m not so uptight and grouchy. My wife never interferes or criticizes me as a father. That has boosted my self-confidence and helped me be an even better dad to my daughter.”

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
end in divorce. The median time from marriage to divorce in first marriages is 8 years compared to 7 years in second marriages. Then too, 75% of divorced people live together before they remarry (Ganong & Colemen, 2006). This means that father–daughter relationships are often strained by a sequence of stressful events: the parents’ divorcing, the father’s living with the woman he will marry, their marrying, and, for 50% of them, divorcing again. Nearly 20% of children are younger than 5 when their parents divorce, and another 33% are between 5 and 10. So most of their parents remarry before the children reach adolescence (Fine & Harvey, 2006).

Which fathers and daughters are the most likely to experience the upheaval of his divorcing again? This seems to depend on several factors. First, before remarrying, most couples ignore or avoid discussing the two subjects that are most likely to lead to another divorce: finances and parenting issues. Many underestimate the challenges that confront second marriages with children, having unreasonable expectations for how easily everyone will blend as a family. Most naively assume that as long as there are no major conflicts during their courtship, there is no need to discuss potentially toxic topics such as intrusive or jealous ex-spouses or the children’s opposition to the marriage. Interestingly, personality characteristics and problems such as depression or substance abuse seem to be less strongly related to a second divorce than these other variables (Ganong & Colemen, 2006).
But regardless of whether the second marriage lasts, how the remarriage affects the father–daughter relationship depends on a number of factors (Ganong & Colemen, 2006; Harvey & Fine, 2010; Stewart & Brentano, 2006). Among the most important are the daughter’s age, maturity and personality, the nature of her relationship with her father, whether her father’s wife has children, how her mother feels about the new marriage, and how well the adults get along. Generally the father–daughter bond is less stressed when the daughter is relatively young or is already an adult when her father remarries, with the adolescent years being the most problematic. It’s also beneficial when the father’s wife has no children, when the mother is happily remarried, or, if not remarried, when she is not upset about the father’s remarrying. And if the three adults get along reasonably well, or at least manage to keep the daughter out of their conflicts, the father–daughter bond is less likely to be damaged. When the new marriage does create tensions between father and daughter, three issues are generally involved: money, jealousy, and the adults’ conflicts.

When her father remarries, financial tensions may arise—or reappear after having been dormant for years. Regardless of each parent’s financial situation, a daughter can still resent her father for spending money on his new wife or other children in the new family. The daughter may also feel uncomfortable or resentful if her father and his wife are enjoying a higher standard of living than her mother. In these situations, the daughter may feel the need to distance herself from her father as a way of compensating her mother for being less well off. Concerns about the father’s money can even extend into inheritance issues: How much money is he going to leave his wife and his new children? Is he spending so much money on this new family that there will be no inheritance? For better or worse, these legal and financial issues must at some point be resolved (Barnes, 2009).

Jealousy also causes stress for many remarried fathers and their daughters. The daughter may feel her father is bestowing far too much time and attention on his new family, leaving her with the “leftovers.” She may assume that her father’s enthusiasm about his new marriage means she is no longer a priority. She may not be mature enough yet to realize that the love parents feel for their spouse is equal to, but distinct from, the love they feel for their children. Jealousy may also arise if she feels her father is being a better parent to the new children than he is—or once was—to
her. And when she is with her father, always having his wife or other children around may feel like an unwelcomed intrusion. The father’s wife may also be contributing to the daughter’s jealousy and insecurity by insisting on always being present or by involving herself in matters that should be left to the father and daughter.

On the other hand, some daughters end up with a closer relationship with their stepmother than with either of their biological parents. For example, one daughter whose stepmother Pam and father divorced and who is estranged from her biological mother writes: “Now with the holiday season fast approaching, I am planning on doing things with Pam. With not even a thought towards either of my birth parents, I will probably send my mother a card and maybe buy my father a present. I know that Pam has had a major hand in shaping what I have become today and for this I will always be grateful” (Harvey & Fine, 2010, p. 122).

Finally, how well a daughter adapts to her father’s marriage is related to how well her mother adapts. The daughter may be especially resentful of her father’s happiness, if her mother is not happily remarried. He has recovered from the divorce, while her mother has not. Pitying her mother can also lead to a more enmeshed relationship that further marginalizes her father. Generally speaking, the old adage holds true: “If mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.”

Remarried fathers, on the other hand, are generally dealing with a different set of issues than their daughters. Too many men feel it is their responsibility to create a friendship between their wife and daughter. Our society bombards us with the message that stepfamilies are supposed to blend together well. Consequently, the father and his wife often feel under pressure to create a family that replicates the media’s ideal, despite the fact that most blended families never meet these unrealistic standards. When wife and daughter do not bond—or do not get along well at all—the father’s relationship with his daughter can become fraught with tension, anger, disappointment, and criticism. More stressful still, the father is trying to maintain a good relationship with his daughter while simultaneously trying to strengthen the bonds with his wife and her children.

On a positive note, remarrying strengthens some father–daughter relationships, and has very little, if any, negative impact on others. These families generally share three things in common (Barash, 2002; Maglin, 1990). First, nobody expects or pressures
the wife and the daughter to become friends. If a friendship develops, well and good; but if not, that is well and good too. Second, the father spends ample time alone with his daughter without his wife and without other children. They preserve the specialness of their father–daughter relationship by keeping it separate from all other relationships in the blended family. Third, the father’s wife encourages and respects the father–daughter bond. She promotes their spending time alone together and does not interfere by attempting to oversee or to improve their relationship.

The Legal System

Finally, most states’ custody laws and the family court system can inadvertently make it more difficult for fathers to maintain a meaningful relationship with their daughters. At present, no state’s custody statutes have a rebuttable presumption of equal parenting. This statute would mean that when the parents cannot reach an agreement on how much time the children will live with each of them, and when they are both fit and loving parents, the law would have the children live equal time with each parent. This presumption would also mean that when parents and their lawyers are negotiating, everyone is aware that the residential parenting time will be divided equally if the parents cannot reach an agreement. Although a number of states are considering this statute, none have yet adopted it. In the meantime, the prevailing system generally grants most of the parenting time and almost all of the residential time to the mother. It has been pointed out that this is one of the reasons why two thirds of all divorces are initiated by women. The mother knows that the legal system will generally award most of the parenting time to her (Brenig, 2005). In support of this hypothesis, divorce rates declined in those states where custody laws were changed to make it more difficult for mothers to gain sole custody of the children (Levy, 2007).

Given current custody laws in most states, the father who wants his children to live with him more than a few nights a month generally has to “bargain in the shadow of the law” with his ex-wife. This means that the state’s custody laws are affecting how the parents, mediators, and lawyers are negotiating. For example, in a state whose custody laws are in favor of shared residential parenting, a father is more likely to stand his ground in negotiating for more than a few nights a month with his children. Bargaining
in the shadow of the law means that even though only 10% of
divorced couples have their case decided by a judge, the other 90% are still being influenced by their state’s custody laws (Mnookin & Kornhauser, 1979).

Generally speaking, fathers say they want more time with the children than they were granted in their custody agreement. We do not know exactly how many fathers wanted more parenting time and why their wishes were denied, either by the mother or by the court. But we do know that one of the reasons why many fathers do not “fight” for more parenting time is that they cannot afford to hire a lawyer to engage in these lengthy and costly custody negotiations. Others acquiesce, sometimes at the urging of their lawyers, because they believe the judge will grant most of the parenting time to the mother anyway (DeCuzzi & Lamb, 2004; Frieman, 2007; Spillman et al., 2004; Stone & Dudley, 2006). Rightly or wrongly, if the father or his lawyer believe that the father will not be awarded shared parenting if the decision is left to a judge, they are less likely to bargain with the mother for shared parenting. This may or may not be a correct assumption. For example, in a survey of 345 divorcing couples in North Carolina, 20% of the fathers were awarded shared residential parenting by a judge, versus only 5% who reached an agreement with a mediator and 10% with a lawyer (Peeples, Reynolds, & Harris, 2008).

On the other hand, in several surveys, male and female lawyers and judges have stated that there is a bias against fathers in the family courts (Braver, Cookston, & Cohen, 2002; Dotterweich, 2000; Stamps, 2002; Wallace & Koerner, 2003; Williams, 2007). But the point is not how much bias exists. The point is that if the father believes there is a bias, his belief will generally prevent him from trying to negotiate for shared parenting.

A particularly controversial issue is whether young children should be allowed to live a portion of the time with their fathers. The family court system has traditionally felt it was “in the best interests of the child” to have young children live exclusively with their mother. The assumption is that young children need to be securely attached to only one primary caretaker. Popular as it is, there are a number of underlying flaws with this belief (Lamb, 2007; Riggs, 2005; Warshak, 2007). First, emotional attachment is not based solely on which adult spends the most time with a child. If that was true, then millions of children would be more attached to their day care workers or relatives than to their parents.
More important still, infants and preschool children benefit from being securely attached to both parents regardless of which parent provides most of their daily care. Each parent’s bond has an equally powerful impact on young children, an impact that lasts a lifetime. Moreover, if a young child is far more strongly attached to one parent, this is not necessarily a good thing—and is not a reason for giving that parent almost all of the time with the children after a divorce. Children can become strongly attached to an emotionally disturbed, depressed, or needy parent. Contrary to popular belief, current research shows that 4- to 6-year-olds who spend overnight time in their father’s home have fewer problems than children who spend every night only in their mother’s home (Pruett, Insabellla, & Gustafson, 2005). In short, we should be dedicated to keeping fathers actively involved in the daily lives of their daughters, including overnight time, regardless of her age.

Understandably, many well-meaning professionals in the family court system are not familiar with the research on the benefits of adequate fathering or shared parenting. For this reason, concerns have been raised about custody evaluators’ level of expertise and their misuse of psychological tests (Ackerman & Dolezal, 2006; Emery, Otto, & O’Donohue, 2005; Kelly & Johnston, 2005). The Family Law Education Reform project has also recommended that law schools provide more training in child development and family dynamics because many lawyers and judges are too poorly trained in these areas (O’Connell & DiFonzo, 2006). Through reforms in the family court system and custody laws, more fathers and daughters will inevitably benefit from being allowed to live together in ways that more closely resemble the life they shared together before the divorce.

Conclusion

As the stories in Box 6.9 illustrate, reconciliation is a difficult yet life-changing experience for those fathers and daughters who try to repair the damage done to their relationship after the parents’ divorce. As we have seen throughout this chapter, a multitude of factors contribute to the damage: the father’s shortcomings as a parent, custody laws and family court attitudes, society’s attitudes toward divorced fathers, the behavior of mothers, parental alienation, financial issues, daughters’ misperceptions, the rela-
ties that existed in the family before the divorce, and the father’s remarriage. Probably no single factor is the tipping point that pushes a father–daughter relationship over the edge. But taken together, any combination of these factors can damage or ruin the bond.

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
The impact of divorce on most daughters is not devastating in terms of their long-term academic, emotional, social, and behavioral well-being. Nevertheless, these daughters are at higher risk of becoming pregnant as teenagers, dropping out of school or underachieving academically, becoming depressed, lacking self-confidence, and having dysfunctional relationships with men. Fathers too are paying the price with increased rates of depression, suicide, alcoholism, and loneliness from no longer being able to live with their daughters. Indeed, the majority of daughters and fathers suffer the same loss: a weakened or severed relationship with one another. African and Hispanic American daughters and fathers are the most at risk, given their higher rates of divorce. But regardless of race or ethnicity, many divorced fathers are spending too little time with their daughters to maintain a meaningful, lifelong bond. While shared parenting helps maintain these relationships, daughters are still paying a higher price than sons in terms of father loss and father hunger. If our society becomes more aware of these losses, we will hopefully work more diligently to change the attitudes, laws, and practices that contribute to the heartbreak that millions of divorced fathers and their daughters endure.

**BOX 6.10  WEBSITES AND DOCUMENTARIES: DIVORCED FATHERS**

**Websites**  
Fathers for Justice fathers-4-justice.org  
American Coalition of Fathers and Children acfc.org  
Divorced Fathers Network divorcedfathers.com  

**Documentaries**  
*Welcome Back, Pluto: Overcoming Parental Alienation* welcomebackpluto.com  
*Victims of Another War: Alienated Children of Divorce* todaysplanet.com  
*Two Divorced Dads Who Fought Back* filmwest.com  
*Diary of a Tired Black Man* tiredblackman.com  
*Guilty Until Proven Innocent* whatblackmenthink.com  
*The Watershed* thewatershedproject.com  

http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346
Review Questions

1. What percentage of daughters are growing up in the various types of married and unmarried American families?
2. What are 10 popular beliefs about divorced fathers and what research or statistics refute each of these beliefs?
3. What are five popular beliefs about the typical American divorce and what research (statistics) refutes each?
4. Which daughters are at highest risk of having divorced parents, and why are they at risk?
5. What is the long-term impact of divorce on most daughters?
6. How much time are most fathers and daughter spending together after the parents’ divorce?
7. What do each of these terms mean and how are they related to the quality of father–daughter relationships after divorce: joint legal custody, residential custody, shared parenting, parenting plans, rebuttable presumption of shared parenting, coparenting, parallel parenting?
8. Why are fathers not spending more time with their daughters after divorce?
9. What do each of these terms mean and how do they influence the father–daughter relationship: gatekeeping, role reversals, enmeshment, parentification, PAS, parental alienation?
10. How does shared parenting compare to sole mother residence in terms of its impact on daughters and on father–daughter relationships?
11. What are the major objections raised to shared parenting, and what research refutes each?
12. What are five myths about shared parenting, and what research refutes each?
13. How are fathers affected by divorce compared to mothers?
14. How can financial issues damage father–daughter relationships after divorce?
15. How do daughters fare in single-father families compared to single-mother families?
16. What are five of the major factors that weaken father–daughter relationships after divorce?
17. How can mothers strengthen father–daughter relationships after divorce?
18. Which fathers are the most and the least likely to pay child support?
19. How can the father’s remarriage damage or complicate his relationship with his daughter, and how might the damage be prevented?
20. How does the legal system sometimes work against father–daughter relationships?

Questions for Discussion and Debate

1. How much and what kind of information should parents share with their teenage or adult daughter about their divorce?
2. If a teenage or adult daughter tells you that her father was a very good parent before the divorce, but that she no longer wants a relationship with him because he cheated on her mother, what would you say to her?
3. What are the pros and cons of the daughter living equal time with both parents after their divorce? If you were the daughter or if you were the parent, what residential custody arrangement would you want?
4. If the parents are not very cooperative or if one of the parents was unfaithful during the marriage, how do you feel about shared residential custody for their daughter?
5. What could our society do to increase the odds that fathers will spend more time with their daughters after the parents’ divorce?
6. What advice would you give a divorcing father with a teenage daughter? How would your advice differ if she were in college?
7. If you are a man dating a woman whose parents are divorced, what would you be most concerned about given what you have read in this chapter? What information would you consider most important to learn about her family?
8. In terms of your relationship with your daughter after a divorce, would you rather be the mother or the father? Why?
9. What advice would you give a teenage or young adult daughter after her parents’ divorce in order to preserve or strengthen her relationship with her father?
10. As a professional working with divorced parents or their daughters, what information in this chapter would you find most useful, and why?
11. If either parent is saying or doing things that are weakening the father–daughter relationship after their divorce, what would you advise the daughter to do?

12. How do you feel about a divorced father’s being expected to contribute money for his daughter’s college education or her wedding when she has had little or nothing to do with him since her parents’ divorce?

13. What are the best and the worst scenarios you have witnessed for daughters whose fathers have remarried? How would you account for these outcomes?

14. If a daughter feels her father is ignoring her for his new wife and other children, what would you advise her to do? Conversely, if his daughter keeps rebuffing him after he remarries, what would you advise the father to do?

15. If you were in a legal battle with your ex-spouse over how much time your daughter should live with each of you—a decision that might eventually be decided by a judge—would you rather be the mother or the father? Why?

References


http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346


Chadwick, L. (2002). Absent parents are more than money. Family Issues, 64, 661–665.


http://www.psyress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346


http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346


Mayseless, O. (2004). I was more her mom than she was mine. *Family Relations, 53*, 78–86.


http://www.psypress.com/fatherdaughter-relationships-9781848729346


