

The White family: Drew, Jon, Karen and Brady

The New Happily Ever After

Making divorce work – for the kids

For the first year of their divorce, Karen and Jon White kept the commitment they made to their sons, then ages 7 and 9, to remain friends. “We faked it for a year or so,” says Karen. “But eventually it was self-fulfilling.”

Making divorce work is a challenge for many families – almost 50 percent of marriages end in divorce each year, according to Americans for Divorce Reform. But despite the difficulty, parents are recognizing the need to protect their children from the pain and confusion of divorce.

The Whites, who divorced in 2000 after 12 years of marriage, have worked hard to not only remain civil to each other, but to enjoy time *together*. “I realize this is unusual, but we have become close friends and still vacation as a family,” explains Karen. “We even do things with friends as a couple, even though we have not been a couple in the traditional sense since our separation.”

Her sons, now 16 and 18, are faring extremely well, she maintains. “They are both very successful academically, athleti-

cally and socially,” she says. “Emotionally they both appear very stable but only time will tell if our divorce affects their future relationships.”

White has advice for other parents struggling with divorce. “Before any decision, reaction or dealings of any sort with your ex, stop and think ‘how will my part in this impact the kids?’ That puts you on the high road, and if you’re lucky, your ex will follow you onto that path. We made a decision when we were splitting that we would not let our relationship issues keep us from parenting as a team. We shared all major decisions about the kids and, although it hasn’t been all roses, we respect each other and support each other when it comes to our children.”

Clinical social worker Allison Granite adds, “The most important thing parents

can do to help ease kids through the divorce process is to constantly reassure them that their relationship with both parents is permanent and continuing. Parents must try to put aside their own personal crisis, which is easier said than done. Tell kids what to expect and give them enough time to process and talk about any major changes – such as a parent moving out of the marital home – before those changes happen. Parents need to be honest, but give age-appropriate answers when children have questions about the divorce. Remember that although the marital relationship might end, responsible parenting must continue.”

Most important, Granite adds, parents should avoid fighting in front of the kids. “One of the biggest problems for kids of divorce is being exposed to parental conflict,” she says. “Divorce doesn’t ‘ruin’ kids – poor parenting does.”

Granite urges parents not to undermine each other, but instead, support each