

"WHAT DIDN'T YOU SAY?"

A Parent's Guide to

Earthquake In ziPland

*An Interactive Computer Quest
Designed to Help Kids Deal with Divorce*

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How many times have you heard the following sentences from your kids?

“I’m fine. Stop bothering me.”

“Nothing is wrong. I told you already”.

“Leave me alone. I don’t want to talk about it...”

You know your child is going through a difficult time with the divorce but is reluctant to talk about his or her feelings and experience.

You want to help, but feel helpless.

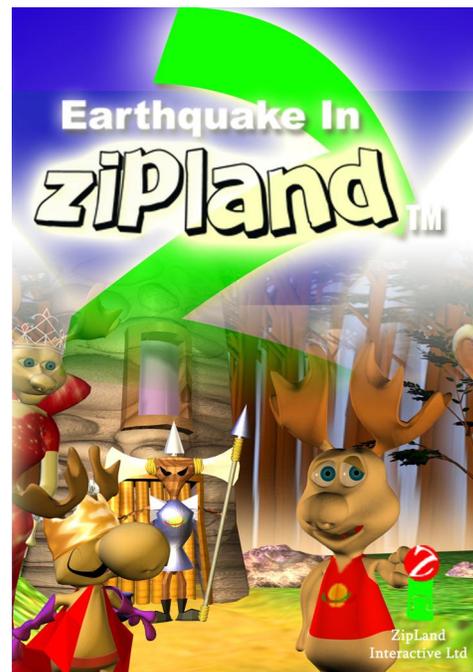
Divorce is NOT a game. Divorce is a difficult and painful process for both parents and their children.

Earthquake in Zipland is an edutainment computer game that aims to help children and parents deal with feelings resulting from the divorce process, and give them cognitive and emotional tools for more effective coping.

This book is written to assist and guide you, the parents, how to use the game to help your child go through and grow through this transition time in his/your lives.

Earthquake in Zipland can enable parents:

- To talk about painful issues which the child is often reluctant to express
- To broaden their knowledge and understanding of the impact of separation on their child
- To play alongside their child and (nonverbally) address personal family issues
- To deal with the issues of separation and divorce in an indirect way
- To open the path to direct dialogue



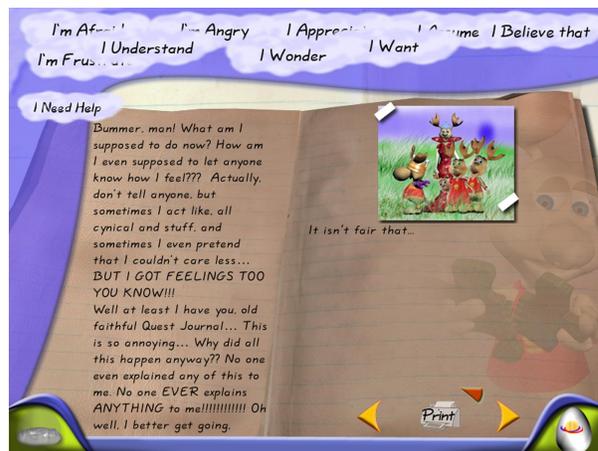
INTRODUCTION:

Moose is living happily on a small paradise island with his parents, the King and Queen of Zipland. The island is held together by a large zipper. Suddenly the earth begins to shake, Moose is thrown to the ground, and before he knows what is going on, a severe earthquake rocks his small paradise and rips the island apart. Moose finds himself on a tiny raft floating in the ocean, full of sadness, guilt and questions: What's going to happen to him now? How will he be able to get through life like this? And will he ever be able to join the halves of his beloved island back together again?

Join Moose and your child on a quest full of adventure, intrigue and surprises. Together, raise questions that can be food for thought and reinforce an optimistic attitude that will help him or her deal with the many questions and emotions that may arise in the future.

In a chaotic situation such as divorce, it is particularly helpful for children to be able to express their creative ability as a way of mastering a situation which they experience as being beyond their control. "Earthquake in Zipland" enables children to use inborn creativity as a way of finding solutions to the challenges of the Quest and indirectly to the challenges in life. As children are generally quite resilient, playing "Earthquake in Zipland" with your child can help you tap into your child's natural strengths and resources, to better cope with the new demands and challenges of life. The use of games as a therapeutic tool encourages children to become more flexible in their thought processes thus becoming "unstuck" from ideas or thoughts that keep them focused on the past and prevent them from seeing the future.

Throughout the quest, the main character Moose keeps a Journal describing his experiences and feelings. One of the fastest and most effective ways to join your child in the game is to simply open the Quest Journal and read it with him, allowing him to answer the questions. Use the Journal as a way to elicit your child's feelings and facilitate communication.



You now know enough to begin playing the game with your child. However, should you want to use the game as a way of understanding your child's thoughts and feelings more directly, you can do the following:

1. Read the manual and select those topics that seem most relevant to your current life situation.
2. Spend one hour a week playing the game with your child and try to focus his attention on the topics and episodes you feel are most significant.
3. As the quest may be difficult for your child, it may be a good idea for you to go into our website and click on "Walkthrough" in order to reveal some of the clues of the game. This knowledge will enable you to better help your child through game.

Note:

We have chosen to use he/she interchangeably when referring to the "child". We hope you won't find it confusing.

As this game was also designed to be enjoyable for adults, you may note that some of the dialogues are satirical in nature and may be more appreciated by adults than by children. Nonetheless, much of the humor will be appreciated by the children as well. The game offers parents and children an opportunity to experience a wide range of emotions together, but places an emphasis on humor.

Remember, humor is both therapeutic and healing.

How to Use this Guide:

Every family has its own comfort level with openness and emotional sharing. From the age of about nine, children generally have a more developed verbal ability and are better able to use language to cope with the loss experienced in divorce. However, as the pain is often too intense to face, children may deny, ignore or avoid it, something that continues into their adolescent years. At the time these defense mechanisms may be an effective way of protecting them from pain, however in the long run the consequences may be serious.



Each section in the guidebook contains a brief description of a psychological issue raised by one of the scenes in the game as well as a referral to a screenshot of the relevant game episode. Following each description are different suggestions a parent may choose to ask or do with his child in order to enhance the effect of the game. These tips are categorized into four sections:

- "Questions Parents May Want to Ask their Children"
- "Information Parents May Want to Elicit"
- "Messages you May Want to Convey to your Child"
- "Tips for Parents."

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

Is a list of questions relating to the characters in the game and can enable the child to express his feeling indirectly through his identification with the characters.

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

Is a list of questions that focuses more directly on what your child is feeling and thinking. Use these questions when you think that your child is ready to share his feelings.

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

Is a list of general ideas that you may want to share with your child.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Is a list of other suggestions you may want to try in order to help your child.

ASKING CHILDREN QUESTIONS – COMMUNICATING WITH CHILDREN

Use of this game relies on the basic sensitivity and understanding that we believe every parent has for their child. Nonetheless, because divorce is a new and stressful situation, many parents may find it helpful to get a list of “do's” and “don'ts” for how to discuss that matter with their children:

Do's:

- Trust your intuition.
- Give your child space and time to begin playing by himself.
- Timing is very important. Be sensitive to the child's pace.
- Try to coordinate questions to what is going on in the game.
- Try to understand what's going on in your child's mind.
- Go with the information that your child gives.
- Use open-ended questions such as: “How do you think Moose is feeling?” “What else might Moose do? What might be worrying the moose?”
- Talk about yourself.
- Respect the parts that your child is not YET ready to talk about.
- Use words such as “yet”, “also” and “at this time” in your sentences. Say things like: “So you do not want to talk about that subject YET...” or “I see you want to play by yourself AT THIS TIME”... “You say you ALSO feel angry.. What ELSE have you felt?”... “What did you like the Most, the Least?”
- Check what help your child wants before offering him answers.

Don'ts:

- Avoid closed-end questions such as those that have “yes” or “no” answers. Questions of this type stop dialogue from developing. “Did you get that?” “Are you enjoying the game?”
- Don't give your child the answers. There are often no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers.
- Don't argue with the child. Present new ideas, but **don't argue**.
- Don't rush things, the child needs time to think and develop ideas.
- Don't interrupt his thoughts - give time to think.
- Don't get upset if your child wants to stop. Say: “It seems you've had enough FOR TODAY.”
- Don't be too academic. Don't act like you are doing homework with your child.

KEEPING A JOURNAL

Journal writing is a therapeutic activity. Very often children who are unable to speak directly about how they feel *are* able to express themselves through writing. Writing can be an experience that helps children release tensions that are bottled-up inside them and sometimes just the act of writing is helpful even if no one knows what the child had written. By writing about one's experiences, one is able to gain some distance or perspective, which in turn may lead to a fresher and healthier perspective on things. Writing helps the child move some of his concerns outside of himself in a way that doesn't erase the thoughts and feelings but allows him to continue to function in a way that is less emotionally charged.



HOW TO BEST USE THE GAME JOURNALS WITH YOUR CHILD

Together with your child, read what the moose wrote, encourage your child to write about *his* thoughts and feelings or to write instead of the moose. The parent can also write in the journal as a way of showing the child how to do so; this is a good way of teaching how to express feelings. Make use of the words that appear in the upper portion of the journal screen to enrich your child's emotional vocabulary. By doing so it will become easier to express himself in words and less necessary for him to express himself in actions.

THE PERSONAL JOURNAL

The personal journal is the child's private journal to which only he can enter by use of his personal password. In the personal journal the child may write things about what she is thinking and feeling and need not share these thoughts with anyone until she is ready to do so.

THE QUEST JOURNAL

The Quest Journal, by contrast, is an important part of the game in which the child is encouraged to express his thoughts and feelings in response to the thoughts and feelings of the main character or even the child's experience of the game and what it arouses in him. The child is rewarded for writing in the journal by getting valuable objects and hints about the game that help him to continue his quest (Hints may be accessible after 9 words are written in the journal as well as pressing the 'I Need Help' button).

THE FANTASY OF CONNECTING THE PARENTS

For years after the separation, children continue to hope that their parents will reunite as a couple and that the family's "wholeness" will be restored. Sometimes they act-out in school, at home or in the community - anything that in their fantasy may bring their parents back together again. The main theme of the game – the split of the island and setting out on the journey to successfully construct a zipper big enough to join the islands together - is a metaphor for this yearning.

Throughout the game, both the hero and the player strive to attain this goal. However, a child's attempts to get his parents back together not only comes at the expense of other important things in his life, but in the end usually doesn't help very much.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- Why do you think Moose wants to get the islands back together?
- Do you think that he will succeed at the end? Why?
- If you were in his place what would you do?
- How do you think Moose feels about this task?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Do you sometimes think about getting your father/mother back together?
- Have you ever done anything to try and get us back together?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- As much as you might like to help us, this is something between us adults. Your energy is better spent with playing, schoolwork and friends.
- If you are already divorced, try to explain to your child that this is a permanent thing that cannot be changed. It is sad, but permanent.
- Though we may be divorced, maybe we can find a few occasional ways of being together for you, such as attending your birthday parties.
- Even though Mom and Dad are living apart, I will do my best to ensure that Mom/Dad and I will always take care of you.

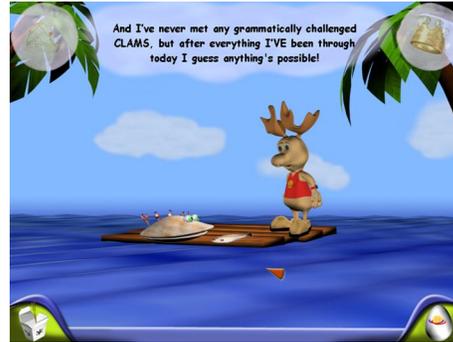
TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Be aware that fantasies of this sort are found in almost all children of divorced parents.
- Be understanding of your child's fantasy, but be firm and gentle in helping him see that it is just a fantasy.
- Help your child understand that many other children also have the same fantasies. Knowing this will give your child a small sense of relief. He or she will realize that they are not alone.
- Help your child focus his energies on things that will help him get ahead and feel fulfilled in life.

FIGHTING

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Prologue, Island Dialogue and Beaver Fight.

Children whose parents are separating or divorcing are often exposed to intense and prolonged parental fighting, which may be a significant source of distress for them beyond the actual separation or divorce itself. Children have a basic need to see both parents in a positive light and this gives them strength and confidence. When parents fight excessively, children may become fearful and worried about their own security as well as the security of their parents. Children need to be taken care of by their parents and find it very stressful to be in a situation where *they* feel that they need to care for their parents.



QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- Why do you think the parents are fighting?
- What are they fighting about?
- Will the fighting help?
- What could they do instead?
- How does Moose feel when his parents fight?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Does your child perceive you and his other parent as fighting often?
- How does your child feel about this fighting?
- What thoughts does he have when his parents fight?
- Does the fighting scare him? If so, what is he afraid of?
- What does he do when his parent's fight?
- What does she feel like saying and doing?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- You know that it's not pleasant for your child to witness the fights and arguments.
- You know that your child should not take sides.
- Even if the parents seem to be arguing about something that has to do with the child, **it is never the child's fault.**
- Parents may fight, but children should be kept out of the arguments.
- Even though I may fight with your father/mother, I will still always love you and do my best to take care of you.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Don't ever fight in front of your kids.
- Don't involve the kids in your fights.
- It is harmful for children to be involved in their parents' arguments. When arguments do occur, find the strength to show your child additional love and warmth.
- Don't talk negatively about the other parent in front of your child.

FEELINGS OF GUILT AND BLAME

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episode: Island Dialogue.

In many cases, even if the child is given an explanation about the reason for the divorce/separation, he doesn't really grasp that reason. Younger children tend to blame themselves for the divorce, thinking it was due to something - no matter how insignificant - that they did or did not do. They may feel they were not good enough in caring for their parents. One reason is that at this age the child's thinking normally tends to be more ego-centric, focused on himself and sees himself as responsible for what occurs around him. This feeling may be inadvertently strengthened by parents who fight about the children in front of them, thus giving them the impression that they are the source of the tension between the parents. These children may assume an inappropriate sense of responsibility for their parents' well-being and devote much of their energy to helping parents resolve their problems at the expense of normal childhood activities such as school, play and friendships.

Adolescents tend to blame one or both parents. They take sides as they move into the teenage years, and become capable of understanding that the reasons for divorce are complex and related to things having to do with the parent and not with the children.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- Why do you think Moose felt that he caused the earthquake?
- Do you think that a child can cause an earthquake?
- How else do you think this could have happened?
- How would you explain to the moose that the earthquake was not his fault?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- How does your child understand the reasons for the divorce?
- In what way does your child feel that he may have caused the breakup?
- Can she think of any other possible explanations for the breakup?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- Children cannot cause earthquakes; it is not their fault that parents divorce.
- It is understandable that you feel some responsibility for our divorce, but really the only ones responsible are your father/mother and I.
- Parents get divorced for reasons that children cannot always understand.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Children may try to influence the process by acting out. It is unhealthy for children to feel that they have any real influence in grown-up decisions.
- Your child will be much healthier if kept out of these matters.
- Children need to be told clearly and unequivocally that it is not their fault.
- Move away from blaming. Blaming causes feelings of guilt and keeps everyone stuck in the past. Being stuck in the past prevents people from mourning the loss of the couple/marital relationship thus not allowing them to move forward with their life.
- Feelings of guilt can be prevented or alleviated by both parents by providing the child with a clear, age-appropriate and agreed upon explanation why the parents are divorcing.
- Reassure your children that they're loved and that the divorce isn't their fault. Many children assume that they are to blame for their parents' hostility.

HELPLESSNESS

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episode: Mall Elevator.



Divorce is a situation forced upon children. For the children, there is almost always a feeling of helplessness and a sense of a situation not of their choosing, one that is forced upon them in which they have no real influence. Even children from physically and emotionally abusive families, who encourage the divorce actively or passively, experience helplessness in the face of their inability to make things better. Their desire for the parents' divorce is their solution for escaping their feelings of helplessness.

It is important to remember that children by their nature – especially younger ones – are very dependent on their parents, not only for their daily needs but also for their emotional well-being. When parents are in a state of crisis, such as when they are getting divorced, they often become less emotionally available to their children. This leaves the children with a heightened sense of helplessness.

Children may feel helpless in terms of being unable to influence their future. Parents should take note that the helplessness experienced by the child in this particular area may also spread to other seemingly unrelated areas such as schoolwork and general behavior.

Children who feel helpless may show signs of unhappiness, difficulty making simple decisions, indecisiveness, giving up too easily on things and withdrawal.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- How do you think Moose feels in the elevator?
- What do you think he can do?

- Are there other possible solutions?
- Have you ever felt that way?
- How does it feel?
- What do you do when *you* get frustrated?
- Do you think that maybe you could do something different when you are frustrated?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Does your child feel angry or helpless in the separation/divorce process?
- What does your child do when he gets angry?
- Has there been a change in his degree of anger over time?
- Despite his frustration, is she able to see hope in the future?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- It's OK to feel frustrated, it will pass.
- Even parents and adults may feel frustrated in this type of situation.
- Although things may seem frustrating today, they will probably clear up in the future.
- If you really put your mind to it, you can usually come up with new solutions to old problems.
- Try to find things in life where you can have control. Even though in some areas you may feel helpless, there are other areas where you can decide what to do.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Children feel helpless when they are forced to make decisions that they are not equipped to make. Do not put a child into a position where he must make an adult decision.
- Helplessness is best tackled by feeling that you are able to make decisions and choose for yourself. Try to find areas in which your child can make his own decisions and therefore feel a sense of competence. For example, give him the opportunity to make even small decision about his daily life such as the hour at which she will take a bath within a time-frame that is acceptable to the parent. If you move to a different house, let the child decide how to organize his room.
- Convey the message to your child that you understand him, that he is not alone and that together you will overcome these difficulties.

DIVISION OF CHILD'S TIME BETWEEN TWO HOUSEHOLDS

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Queen's Castle, King's Castle and Fair.

The move from living in one home to living in two is not simple. The necessity for the child to divide his time between two parents may cause conflicts between parent and child. The child may feel that he is being bounced back and forth like a ping pong ball. As much as we would like to think that we can create two equal houses for the child, in reality this does not always work. He may experience a conflict between the schedules in the two houses and as a result, a conflict between the parents. He may want to be in both places at same time, something which is impossible. Parents should be aware that the child's wanting to be in one place does not mean that he doesn't want to be in other places as well. Since a home is designed to provide a child with stability, predictability, security, continuity and belonging, each parent needs to figure out a way to give these to the child despite the logistical difficulties.



Parents often see or interpret things in a way that suits their position but not in a way that reflects the child's genuine feelings and thoughts.

Parents should remember that children may choose to resolve this conflict in different ways. Some may be very compliant and do whatever they are told, if only not to get anyone angry at them. Others, however, may seem more assertive or even defiant and may very clearly express a preference for one house over the other. A child's preference will be influenced by many factors: his previous relationship with the parent, the parent's personality, the location of each home, the presence of a new partner, etc. Generally speaking, the older the child is, the more clearly he will express a preference. It should be remembered that with time, most children are able to successfully adjust to dividing their life between two homes.

We are aware that in certain instances a child may have only one home because one parent is absent. Nonetheless, parents should keep in mind that the child may very well still harbor the fantasy of having two parents and two homes and may still have hidden loyalties to the absent parent, even if she is angry at that parent. The child may feel torn between the real home in which she lives and the one that exists in his fantasy but in reality is missing. It should always be remembered that when a parent is absent, even if the child acts seemingly indifferent, the image of that parent - for better or for worse - is always with the child. This may show itself particularly when your child is angry at you and she fantasizes that if she could be at his or her other home, things would be much better.

We should always keep in mind that in certain situations, some children may actually experience an improvement in quality of life with the absence of constant conflict and tension.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What is it like for Moose to have two homes?

- What do you think is most confusing and frustrating for him?
- When he is in one home, how often do you think he thinks about the other home?
- Do you think that when he's in one home that there are objects from the other home that he may want or need? Which objects?
- Do you think that his mother will allow him to bring objects from her house to his father's house? Which ones?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- How does the child feel about the division of his time between two households?
- Is it uncomfortable for him? When is it most uncomfortable for him? When is it most comfortable?
- What conflicts still arise?
- What would he want to be different?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- You understand that splitting his time between two homes may be confusing and inconvenient.
- Think with your child about the possible advantages of two homes, e.g. it's OK to do things differently in each house.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- A child needs both parents and both homes.
- We understand that the transition of the child between two households may also be emotionally difficult for the parents, but try to shield the child from these difficulties and make the transition as smooth and painless as possible.
- Allow the child to bring items from one house to the other. This allows for continuity in the child's life. Remember that continuity is an essential feature in positive psychological adjustment.

SPLIT OF LOYALTIES

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Forest, Queen's Castle, King's Castle and Fair.



It is not rare for the child to find himself in a powerful and painful conflict of loyalty between his mother and father: Who does he want to live with? With whom should he live? Who is right? Where, in fact, is his home – with his mother or with father? Who needs him more? Who will stay with him and take care of him?

Loyalty to the parents tears the child apart and creates a split in his sense of belonging. Sometimes the child finds himself in the midst of the “cold” or “hot” war between the parents and is manipulated directly or indirectly to take operative steps in, for instance, money matters or investigations about what goes on when he or she is in the other parent’s home, etc.

Younger children will respond more hesitantly and adolescents can be angry and direct. They can be drawn into the confrontation, pass messages between the parents and be in a dual loyalty situation. Adolescents can take a stand and often choose the parent they think is in need of more care. They are judgmental and suffer from their involvement in the conflict.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- How does Moose feel in this situation?
- Why did you choose for the moose to take this path?
- What do you think Moose would want to say to his parents now?



INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Does the child feel that if he behaves in a certain way with one parent that the other will feel sad, rejected, unloved or mad?
- Does the child feel that she has to keep secrets from one parent to protect or to please him?
- When does the child feel that he should not tell one of the parents something?
- In what situations does the child feel that she has to be a go-between and a peacemaker between her parents?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- It makes me feel good that you love the person I chose to be your other parent.
- I am strong. You don't need to worry. You don't have to keep secrets from me to protect me. I am always here to protect you and take care of you, not the opposite. Secrets are poison in families.
- Unless you are in danger, don't feel that you have to share anything with me about what goes on in the other parent's house (unless of course you feel comfortable doing so.)

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Don't force your child to choose between you and their other parent.
- Remember – in order to grow up healthy your child needs to have access to two healthy parents.
- Never disparage your former spouse in front of your children. Children know they are "part mom" and "part dad," and the criticism can batter the child's self-esteem.
- Don't use your children as messengers. The less the children feel a part of their parents' battle, the better.
- Your children may be tempted to act as your caretaker. Resist the temptation to let them. Let your peers, adult family members, and mental health professionals be your counselors.
- Let your children be children.

LOSS

Good opportunities to elaborate on this issue can be found all throughout the game.

Divorce almost always creates a sense of loss for children. Not only do they lose the daily contact that they had with both parents but they also lose the feeling of family togetherness that they often felt around things like family meals and holiday celebrations. At times, children may actually lose contact with relatives either as a result of a move or as a result of animosity in the family. In addition, as a result of moving to a different place, the child may lose contact with friends and schoolmates, as well as the sense of security that he had in familiar surroundings. The sense of loss may also cause children to feel different or even embarrassed in the company of their peers.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What do you think changed in Moose's life after the island split apart?
- What things do you think he may have lost?
- What things does he miss the most about the life that he had before the island split?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- What things does your child miss since the divorce?
- What has been the greatest loss for him?
- What things from the past would he like to restore?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- You understand their sense of loss and the pain that they feel.
- You may want to share with him that you too feel a sense of loss though this sadness will not get you down but rather push you to find new ways of continuing forward.
- Loss always feels most intense at the beginning and at that point it is difficult to see how things will work out in the future but with time things usually seem to work out. You just need to be very patient. Very often we are able to find things that even though they can't really replace the loss, can make us feel much better such as more time alone with the non-resident parent when visiting, more telephone and internet communication, etc.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Try to ensure as much continuity as possible in your child's life.
- Maintain contact with as many relatives as possible, particularly those who were significant in your child's life. Even if *you* are angry with them, it does not mean that your child is angry at them.
- If you have to move to a different place, help your child maintain contact with friends through email, webcam and Messenger, or letters and phone calls.
- If there is no contact with the father, find a male relative who can be the male "blood bond". Male bonding can be especially important for boys.

LONELINESS AND BELONGING

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Dark Cave and Penguins.

Children of divorce find themselves much more alone than children in families with two parents because single parents have less time and energy. Divorced parents need to work longer hours to make a living, invest more in professional and personal development as well as look for new love. Participation in activities with friends, other family members and with people in the community can partially reduce the feeling of loneliness of the child as well as create a sense of belonging.

It is important to note that loneliness is not related to the number of people around the child but rather the connection that the child feels to those people. A person can feel lonely in a room full of people if he feels no connection to them or warmth from them. On the other hand, if a child has a good relationship with a small group of people or even one person, she will not feel lonely.



QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- Do you think that the moose feels lonely? How do you know?
- Who does he talk to about what he feels?
- What does Moose think it's like for his parents now that they don't live together anymore? Do they miss each other? Do they think they have made new friends yet?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- When does your child feel most lonely?
- What does he do when he feels lonely? What else?
- Who does she call or talk to?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- We will rebuild our family.
- We will make new friends.
- We are still a family.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- In part, the loneliness could be handled by achieving a sense of belonging and social support.
- Be on the lookout for signs that the child is lonely.
- Especially with younger children who cannot make their own social lives, be sure to provide them with new social groups.
- Try to further involve grandparents and aunts and uncles in the life of the child.
- Get yourself invited to more family dinners.
- Make more family dinners.
- Invite people over more.

GETTING PERSPECTIVE: HOPE AND CHANGE

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Inside the Tower and Epilogue.



When we are feeling hurt, sad or lonely, it is usually difficult to see the end of it. We lack perspective and fear that things will always be tough. We are not always able to be hopeful. Our view of the future tends to be very limited in scope, frightening and negative. This negative thinking only increases the difficulty. The function of any therapeutic intervention is to open up alternatives, new angles and hope. It should be remembered that when people are deep in a crisis, they are unable to see the “big picture” but rather focus on the negative aspects without being able to appreciate the positive things that also exist. However if someone helps us see that things might not be quite so bad, we might be able to change how we see things and maybe even feel a little better.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What do you think Moose sees when he looks into the telescope of the Past?
- What do you think Moose sees when he looks into the telescope of the Present?
- What does Moose see when he looks into the telescope of the future?
- Which telescope do you think Moose likes to use best?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Despite feeling sad at times, is your child still able to appreciate the happy things in life?
- After an initial period of sadness, is your child able to be optimistic about the future?
- When confronted with a sad or frustrating situation, is your child able to think creatively about new possible solutions?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- Even though things may seem very difficult today, they will get better in the future.
- Life is full of surprises and often good and happy things happen to us even when we don't expect them.
- When someone is sad, it may seem to her that the situation is hopeless but you know from your experience as a parent that change does occur, not only in life events but in feelings as well, and you know she will soon feel happier.
- Despite all the things your child is not happy about at *this* point in time, what things does he still enjoy and what still makes him happy?

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- When confronted with a challenge, think together with your child about possible solutions.
- Even when your child is sad or frustrated try, together with him, to also focus on the good things in his life.
- Help your child think not only about the present but about the future as well. Help him explore different possibilities using fantasies and dreams and think together about ways to realize these dreams.

SELF-IMAGE AND PEER GROUP

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Basketball Court and Dialogue with Oyster.

Despite the high number of divorces, many children still speak of their loneliness, lowered self-image and shame about the situation when facing friends and teachers. These feelings are especially acute in the first period after the divorce. We need to remember that a child's self-esteem is based on his feeling happy and complete and being surrounded by love. Divorce may temporarily disrupt your child's positive self-esteem. Children don't like to feel different from their peers and your child may feel, at least at the beginning, that he is the only one who has this problem. Of course, he will realize that there are other children in his class whose parents are also divorced, but in the beginning, at least, this may not help him feel any better about himself. However, as time passes and he is able to speak with other children about their similar experiences, your child will feel less strange or different.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What do you think the moose is thinking here?
- Why do you think the moose is embarrassed to speak?
- Do *you* think the moose really has a good reason to be embarrassed?
- What would you do if you were embarrassed like the moose?



INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- When is your child embarrassed about the divorce?
- If so, what is she embarrassed about?
- Does his embarrassment prevent him from doing things or going places?
- What can you as a parent do to help your child feel less embarrassed?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- There's no need to feel ashamed, everyone has his own earthquakes. That is to say, everyone has *some* problems.
- You're not so different but everyone has his special traits: a giraffe has a long neck; a kangaroo has his pouch and you have a special story. Everyone has a different story.
- If you have the courage to use your strengths, you will see that despite the divorce other children will accept and even respect you.
- What else are you besides a child of divorce? And what else?
- It is not your fault that we are divorced.
- You are not worth any less than any other child just because your parents are divorced. What determines a kid's value is not what his parents do but rather who he is.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- When a child becomes withdrawn, embarrassed or fearful, he needs more attention and warmth.
- Conversations with children should convey empathy and understanding but also should gently encourage them in the direction of finding their own solutions.

ATTITUDE TOWARDS MONEY

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Parents' Booth at the Fair.

Money symbolizes power, control and security, but also a means of survival. All the elements represented by money are the reason that money is one of the most important cause of quarrels between parents after divorce.

Divorce leaves many families below the poverty line and, at best, the economic means are cut in two. The game provides a number of figures that worship money in an exaggerated and caricature-like way. However, the main problem is that the King and Queen have lost their money and are forced to work as salespeople at stands in the fair, even selling some of their own personal belongings.

Children may be overly involved with parents' money issues. Divorce usually leads to reduction in lifestyle and income. Parents may involve children in money issues that otherwise they may not have been involved in. This may enhance children's sense of loss, as children may be caught in middle.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What changes has your child experienced since separation in terms of money?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Does your child worry about money and being taken care of?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- We may need to get along with less money for a while.
- We will make things work out just fine. Money is not everything.
- We may need to make some changes as we now have less money to live on.
- You do not have to worry about food, clothes and shelter.
- We will ask for help if we will need to.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Try not to involve children in money matters.
- Both parents must do their best to try to preserve the child's pre-divorce standard of living.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Quest Journal, Parents' Crystal Balls.

Sometimes, due the demands of everyday life and our need to discipline our children, we do not pay enough attention to giving them positive feedback. Warm words of encouragement are always important to children, especially in times of crisis and turmoil.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- How important do you think it is for Moose to hear kind words from his parents?
- Do you think that Moose's parents are there for him enough?
- Do you think he needs more encouragement from his father or his mother?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Do you think that I am there enough for you?
- When do you feel that you need to hear more kind words from me?
- What things don't I say that you would like me to say?
- What things do I say that you would rather I didn't?
- Does your child feel that you are available enough for him?
- Could it be that at times your child feels that you are too caught up in the divorce process and not focused enough on his needs?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- Despite the fact that you are very busy, you always have time for your child.
- If your child feels that you are unavailable, he should tell you. Sometimes you need his help in pointing out things to you.
- Even though at times I may seem angry and even unhappy, I always love you. You are not the reason why I feel this way.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Try to make use of the positive messages the parents gives Moose. You can help your child by saying things like:

I love you.

Keep up the good work.

You're doing just fine.

You are doing great.

Wish I could lend you a hand with that.

You can do it.

I'm so proud of you, your behavior, your attitude, etc.

Just ask and I'm there for you.

- Don't limit yourself to things on this list. Use your creativity and understanding of your child, his needs and his language to say whatever will be most meaningful to him.
- Even when you are angry at your child, try to find something she did in which you can express your appreciation.

ASKING FOR HELP

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in the Parents' Crystal Balls.

Children always need help from their parents. Because they are limited in their abilities and understanding, they need assistance from adults who have more experience and knowledge. However, children may not always *ask* for help. They may be shy or embarrassed, or feel that asking for help is a sign of weakness. Also, children may be afraid of rejection and particularly in situations where they see that their parent is in distress, they might feel that asking for help places an additional burden on them.

QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What do you think about the answers the king and queen gave to the moose?
- How do you think Moose felt about asking for help?
- Who can he turn to for help?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- Do you feel that you have someone to turn to for help? If not, why?
- What things does your child feel that you can best help her with and what things does she think the other parent can best help her with?
- What would make it easier for your child to ask for help when he is in distress?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- It is important to know how to strike the right balance between trying to do things yourself and asking for the help of others.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Learn the gentle art of encouraging independence in your child while also helping out a little.

LACK OF CONCENTRATION

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Basketball Court – Flies episode.

Children in a state of stress find it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Their heads are full of thoughts on the traumatic divorce experience. A thought-filled head is presented in the “flies episode” - the flies being a metaphor for the disturbing thoughts. The ‘positive thinking feather’ helps Moose to free himself of these thoughts. (Do not reveal this clue unless your child requests it.)



QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What did the flies remind you of?
- What do you think Moose felt?
- Do you remember a situation where you had a hard time concentrating?
- What did you do then?
- Have you noticed when I seem to have a lot on my mind?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- What are some of the thoughts, worries, dreams and wishes the child may have?
- When does the child have difficulty keeping his mind on the task at hand?
- What happens when he finds himself daydreaming or distracted?
- Who can she talk to when this happens?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- It is normal and expected to be preoccupied when divorce occurs.
- When we are upset we often cannot concentrate.
- It is helpful to share this and get help from adults.
- A hug and reassurance is a great comfort, giving it as well as receiving it.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Children are often embarrassed and ashamed of being unable to perform as expected. They will not voluntarily share these troubles.

Ask them about their day in some detail.

Be sensitive about what you share with their teachers and be in regular touch with their school. Groups for parents and children on Separation and Divorce are supportive and helpful.

THE UPSET BALANCE

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episode: Boat Race.

In every family there is some sort of balance, a sense of something whole.

In divorce there is a sense of disruption, of something whole breaking, of a balance being upset.

In this situation a vacuum is created and one of the children may tend to take on the role of one of the parents and become a "parental child".

The game expresses this creation of a void in the Boat Race episode, when it turns out there are less people on the boat than planned, causing the Moose to cry out: But now there're only THREE of us left!

The beaver's mother, who is participating in the race, takes over and enables all the other participants to take the responsibility appropriate to their age.



QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- Who did you think would come to the rescue?
- What do you think the moose could have done?
- What do you think Moose learned from this race?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- How does your child behave when he most feels that the other parent is not around?
- What does he try to do?
- To whom does he turn?
- What helps him to feel better?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- When parents split up *they* take on more responsibility, not the children.
- There are many shapes and sizes to families and they are still whole.
- You do not expect or want your child's role to change. You need him to keep being a kid.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **Be attentive to when your child acts like an adult.**
- Reinforce your ability to handle things and encourage your child's age appropriate behavior.
- If one child tries to parent another, say "One mother and one father is enough for everybody." "Thanks for helping, but he/she needs you as a brother/sister."
- Encourage the siblings to stick up for each other, even against you as a parent. They need to feel the security of that bond.

POWER, STRENGTH OR THE SUPERMOOSE

A good opportunity to elaborate on this issue can be found in episodes: Super Moose

As already mentioned, most youngsters fantasize for years about the possibility of their parents getting together again and reuniting the family. This yearning is accompanied by a sense of helplessness and inability to change the life situation. Sometimes the imagination produces **omnipotent** scenarios in which everything is possible. “If only I were Superman.”



QUESTIONS PARENTS MAY WANT TO ASK THEIR CHILDREN

- What do you think Moose would have wanted different?
- What would you have wished from someone like SuperMoose who could change anything? What else?

INFORMATION PARENTS MAY WANT TO ELICIT

- When have they ever wished for a miracle or a superhero?
- When have they ever wanted to be that superhero?
- Has anyone ever rescued them in a jam?
- When have they felt they wanted to be rescued but no one came?
- Who could we choose to ask to be an additional protector?

MESSAGES YOU MAY WANT TO CONVEY TO YOUR CHILD

- We will always be your parents, you cannot divorce a child.
- It is highly unlikely that we will re-unite.
- We are able to be better parents when we are not aggravating each other.
- Now that we're separated, you get double the best of each parent.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Be sensitive to how hurtful the permanence of the separation is to your child.
- Be aware that he or she will not give up trying.
- Sometimes children will misbehave (often in school) to unite their parents in “solving” the problem of their behavior.

EPILOGUE



Part of dealing with the divorce situation for children is accepting the permanency of the divorce and letting go of the desire to rebuild the original family and the parents' marriage. Acceptance is connected with the ability to understand the needs, experiences and motivations of the parent as independent from those of the child.

This stage includes a solution to the question of relations with the parents and the children's trust in their ability to develop future relationships with others and to be loved and loving persons. When things are tough and there is no way in which to change a situation, all that is needed in order to handle the pain is to change one's attitude, to forgive and to accept. That is much easier said than done.

Our hope is that the above message, transmitted in the epilogue of the game, will provide another stage in the quest of life to achieve this possibility.

We are certain that every professional, parent and child will find topics and episodes that they can connect to, and there will be topics and points of reference that they wish had been included: the very topics we decided to leave out of the game.

Just as there are no perfect families, people or divorces, there is no game that can cope with all the issues and provide all the answers.

We hope this game offers enough food for thought, fun and stimulation, and that it will raise questions and surprises that will reinforce an optimistic attitude in the future.

**Divorce, then - is not a game.
Divorce is a hard and painful process.
Earthquake in Zipland is a game.**

GAME SCREENSHOTS

Island



Elevator



Forest



King's/Queen's Castle



Inside Tower



Fair/Booths



Boat Race



Beaver Fight



Penguins



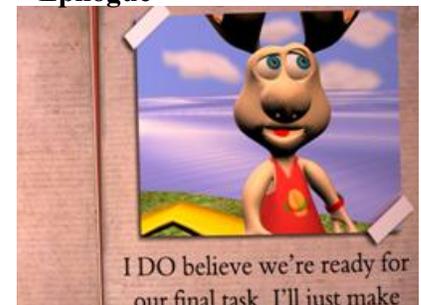
Basketball Court



Super Moose



Epilogue



"WHAT DIDN'T YOU SAY?"

A Parent's Guide to:

Earthquake in Zipland - An Interactive Computer Quest

Designed to Help Kids Deal with Divorce

"Too often, stepchildren have a hard time with loyalty conflicts because they haven't worked through feelings about their parents' divorce. This amazing video game with its wacky dialogue, adventure and intrigue, can help children work through intense emotions and heal while they play this thrilling game".

Elizabeth Einstein, MA/MFT

America's leading stepfamily educator

Author of Strengthening Your Stepfamily

"...this game is an ingenious way to help children deal with the pain of divorce. It will also be a tremendous help for counselors, teachers and therapists who work with children suffering from divorce loss...it is an inventive tool that is a 'must have' for children of divorce and the people who work with them."

Beverly and Tom Rodgers,

Marital and Family Therapists

Authors of Adult Children of Divorced Parents

Resource Publications, 2002

www.ziplandinteractive.com



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