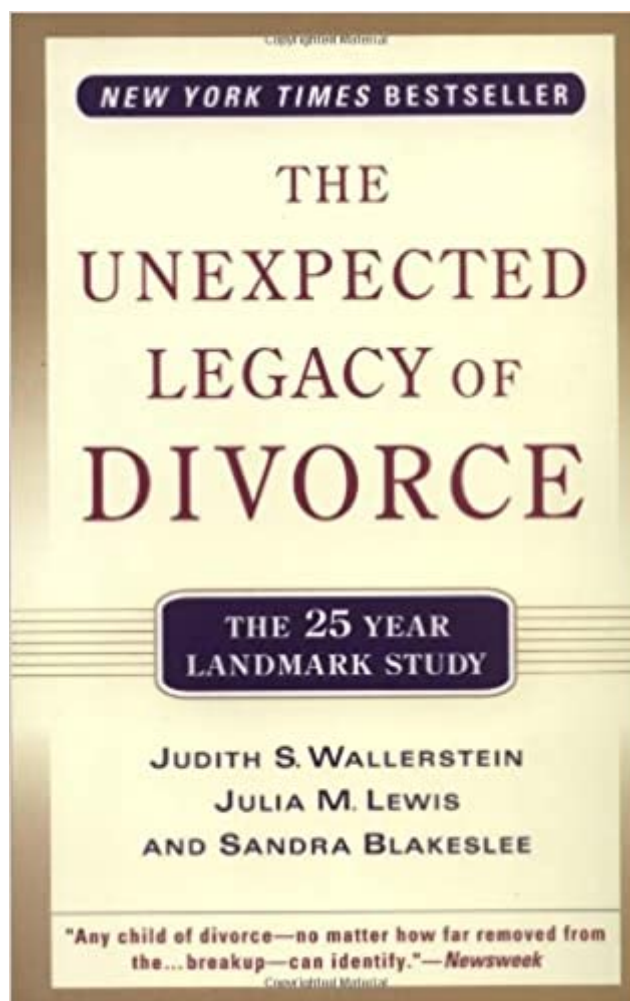


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# The Unexpected Legacy Of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study



## Synopsis

Finally in paperback, the New York Times bestseller that has fundamentally changed the way children of divorce see themselves as adults--updated with a new preface by the author. Divorce is at once a widespread reality and a painful decision, so it is no surprise that this landmark study of its long-term effects should both spark debate and find a large audience. In this compelling, thought-provoking book, Judith Wallerstein explains that, while children do learn to cope with divorce, it in fact takes its greatest toll in adulthood, when the sons and daughters of divorced parents embark on romantic relationships of their own. Wallerstein sensitively illustrates how children of divorce often feel that their relationships are doomed, seek to avoid conflict, and fear commitment. Failure in their loving relationships often seems to them preordained, even when things are going smoothly. As Wallerstein checks in on the adults she first encountered as youngsters more than twenty-five years ago, she finds that their experiences mesh with those of the millions of other children of divorce, who will find themselves on every page. With more than 100,000 copies in print, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce* spent three weeks on the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and Denver Post bestseller lists. The book was also featured on two episodes of Oprah as well as on the front cover of Time and the New York Times Book Review.

## Book Information

Paperback: 351 pages

Publisher: Hachette Books; 1st edition (September 19, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0786886161

ISBN-13: 978-0786886166

Product Dimensions: 5.3 x 1.1 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 168 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #52,209 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in [Books > Parenting & Relationships > Family Relationships > Divorce](#) #65 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Children's Studies](#) #116 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Marriage & Family](#)

## Customer Reviews

During the last 40 years, our society's views on how families are created and how they operate has undergone a tremendous shift. In *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*, authors Judith Wallerstein,

Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee have assembled a variety of stories from people of different ages and life stages. Some are children of divorce, some are from families that stayed unhappily intact, but all of them offer valuable information important to all of us as parents, children, and members of society at large. Separate chapters focus on the different roles children take on in the event of a divorce or unhappy marriage, ranging from positive role model to deeply troubled adolescent. In many cases, the people interviewed continue to define themselves as children of divorce up to 30 years after the occurrence; this is described by one subject as "sort of a permanent identity, like being adopted or something." Both encouraging and thought-provoking, the final chapter questions how we maintain the freedom made possible by divorce while, at the same time, minimizing the damage. The authors' response to this question begins with pragmatic suggestions about strengthening marriage--not bland "family values" rhetoric but practical how-to ideas combined with national policy initiatives that have been making the rounds for years. With fascinating stories and statistics, Wasserstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee have illuminated the improvements within reach while our society experiences these massive changes in it's most fundamental relationships. --Jill Lightner

--This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Twenty-five years ago, when the impact of divorce on children was not well understood, Wallerstein began what has now become the largest study on the subject, and this audiobook, which McIntire reads with compassion and warmth, presents the psychologist's startling findings. By tracking approximately 100 children as they forge their lives as adults, she has found that contrary to the popular belief that kids would bounce back after the initial pain of their parents' split, children of divorce often continue to suffer well into adulthood. Their pain plays out in their relationships, their work lives and their confidence about parenting themselves. Wallerstein argues that although the situation is dire, there is hope to be found at the end of good counseling and healing. Unfortunately, in her desire to communicate a lot in a highly accessible format, Wallerstein verges on oversimplification at times. Nonetheless, hers is an important contribution to our understanding of what is a central social problem. Based on the Hyperion hardcover (Forecasts, July 17, 2000). Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Having suffered through an unwanted divorce twenty years ago, and having taken on the full responsibility for raising my two children (ages 10 and 13 at the time), "The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce" was a welcomed book by me and my children. My children have continued to experience divorce related issues as they have moved into adulthood. Maturity, relationships, marriage, and

parenting have been catalysts for the emergence of feelings that were buried and denied. Judith Wallerstein's excellent book provides the context and structure for my adult children to explore and understand their "new" feelings (and behaviors) enabling them to move-on, happier and emotionally healthier. My children, their spouses, and I have all read "Unexpected Legacy of Divorce." We have and will continue to use the book as a resource in our on-going effort to get closure. We have all come to understand that the feelings and behaviors that are surfacing are not unique but, rather, are quite "normal" for children of divorce. This has been of great comfort for them - allowing them to cleanse the shadows of divorce and move forward with greater confidence that they are not weird. Wallerstein has conducted a longitudinal research study of divorce dating back to the late 1970's. "Unexpected Legacy" is the third and most recent book based on the study. In previous books, she has studied the effects of divorce, not only on children, as she has in this book, but also on the divorcing parents. All of the books are "must reads" for those who are considering divorce or have divorced. Over the years, I have had a number of people confide in me that either they or their spouses were considering divorce. My advice has always been to read Wallerstein's series to learn the variety of outcomes that can arise post-divorce and the strategies of those who fared best. Those considering divorce are all well advised to "do their homework." These books are also a must read for anyone involved in family and/or divorce counseling - religious or secular counselors. In "Unexpected Legacy of Divorce," the authors address the myth that the children will do fine if the parents are happy - divorced. Children, no matter how amicable and settled the parents are after divorce, suffer greatly. They lose their family, they lose control of their life (to the whims of parents and rules of courts), and they lose their childhood. All of these combine to provide a series of struggles as they move into adulthood and beyond. Important subject areas covered in this book include:

- \* The ghosts of childhood - the bottomline after 25 years
- \* The exploitation of children by divorcing parents
- \* The development path to adulthood being thrown out of sync
- \* Pushing a child's real feelings and thoughts underground by being busy
- \* Children trapped by real feelings and thoughts of the break-up
- \* Children dealing with the loss of THEIR nuclear family; the family that created them just vanishing - a loss that will be quietly or openly mourned throughout their lives.
- \* Why children turn on a parent(s) years later
- \* Children living with and coping with chaos
- \* Children and low self-esteem
- \* The missing father or mother after divorce
- \* Children growing up lonely
- \* Relationships with the "steps" (step-parents)
- \* The loss of mom - whether or not she is physically available
- \* Court ordered visitation and its disruption of a "real" life for the children to make mom and dad complete
- \* Children of divorce taking the leap in relationships and marriages - the return of the relationship ghost
- \* The role of an intact family for modeling and shaping children whether their

parents marriage is filled with joy, or loveless, or abusive\* Other residues of divorce for children - fear of loss, fear of change, fear that disaster will strike, especially when things are going well\* And the need for all involved in divorce, directly or indirectly, to be educated on all the issues that emanate from the divorce for children over their life as well as in the short term. This will not be an easy read for many. It was not intended to be. Nevertheless, the journey this book provides will be fruitful. I recommend this and Wallerstein's other books highly. These are an important books which will not diminish in value over time. These are classics.

As a child of divorce, now in my second shaky marriage, I have found tremendous insight about my own life in this book. I appreciate the secular and scientific viewpoint, and as a Christian, these testimonies only stand to confirm my beliefs. My only complaint is that the solutions offered are highly unrealistic. To apply any sort of government-inspired bandaid is just, quite simply, unfeasible. If that be the case, then why not make it a rule to apply these parenting and relationship principles before the marriage certificate can be applied for? But again, I highly value the viewpoint and the hard work done here. Bravo & prayers for the all the people involved.

I was led to this book a few weeks ago, coming upon it "accidentally." Over the past few years since my divorce, my sadness once for me has changed to my children. I have felt increasingly concerned about them, and reached out to them to understand how my divorce has affected them. Lewis' detailed and personal study clarified and confirmed what I'd already been suspecting. I found two of the studies particularly applicable to our situation. Her documented experiences will help me help my children in the years to come. I will let them read it themselves when appropriate, to help validate their own struggles and give them direction.

Children of divorce carry their parents choices into their adult lives in unexpected ways. Though my parents divorced 30 years ago and up until recently I had talked myself into believing that the past was put to rest, I realize now that this process still haunts me. Not being the kind of person that has much time normally for therapists, self-help, or dredging up old garbage it was hard to confront that this was work I badly needed to do even after all this time. After all, the post-divorce households I lived in were not abusive or damaging in any way I could ever put a finger on. And my parents tried to do their best under admittedly lousy circumstances. I convinced myself I'd made out okay, but I was wrong. Wrong, simply because those of us whose childhoods were defined by our parents' divorce still can have our feelings and behaviors heavily influenced by fears with roots in what we

lived through. This book helped me realize the depth of the hurts I sustained and in so doing see the relationships in my life today with new eyes. It has increased my resolve to be loving and vulnerable with my spouse and children and to shake off a numbness that I have suffered silently from most of my adult life. This is not a self-help book per se but there is help here simply in gaining understanding. It was hard going but left me feeling more optimistic. I appreciated the absence of moral judgement and the non-religious lens on family matters. I ended the book feeling called to duty, determined that no matter what it takes my children will never have to know what it was like to grow up in a family riven by divorce.

I found the trends and analysis fascinating as well as hauntingly accurate. My own journey as a child of divorce was amazing clear and much of what I sought to reconcile was directly addressed. Likewise the challenges I've unleashed on my own adult children and their subsequent rejection of me is also painfully obvious. There is not a human who will not take away an insight and an ah-ha.

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