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Breaking up is hard on

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For Bill Potter, his parents' divorce — which occurred six years ago — is a hazy memory. "I'm used to it. I see my dad anyway," said Bill, 13, who lives with his mother. For Bill's longtime friend Dan Dailey, however, issues surrounding his parents' divorce are vivid and recent — and painful. His mother and father divorced two months ago.

"My father calls a lot, but I feel an absence of things I used to have. We used to go to Amerks (hockey) games, but we don't do that as much. I wish we still had that," said Dan, 13. He and Bill are youth-group members at Guardian Angels Church in Henrietta.

Many young Catholics interviewed for this story spoke of a wide range of unhappy experiences due to their parents' divorces: listening to their parents argue; moving out of the home they grew up in; infrequent contact with the parent they're not living with; being a "go-between" when parents won't speak to each other; wondering why they were put into counseling after being assured the divorce wasn't their fault.

These teens have learned at an early age that saying "I do" does not guarantee a couple will remain husband and wife forever. In fact, said Kasha Holler, youths affected by divorce learn many harsh realities about life before their peers do.

"I grew up so much faster," said Kasha, 17, from Fairport's Church of the Assumption. "I think I'm wiser than most of the kids around me. I analyze everything."

Kayte Malik, 15, and her brother Joey, 12, have also found that their maturing process has been accelerated. Since their parents divorced 10 years ago, their mother has worked full-time for most of that period and is now attending college full-time.

Kayte and Joey, parishioners at St. Jerome's Church in East Rochester, frequently perform chores around the house such as preparing dinner — a skill Joey excels at, Kayte noted.

"He makes hamburgers good," she commented. "My mom called last night and said, 'Will you make hamburgers for dinner?' and I said, 'Ask Joey to do it.'"

Joey added that he fixes the television and VCR, and just began mowing the lawn this year.

Assumption's Max Denler, 14, also observed a change in household rituals after his parents' divorce 10 years ago.

"My mother had wanted to be the one to clean the house, be there when I come home, and make cookies," said Max, whose mother has since remarried. "But she worked a lot. It was really hard for her."

Dan of Guardian Angels extends a similar level of compassion to his mother's struggle with life after divorce.

"A couple of months after my dad left, my mom sat (my brother and me) down and explained the situation," Dan said. "Then I went down to watch TV and when I came upstairs, my mom was crying. I said, 'Don't worry, Mom. We'll get through it.'"

Joey Malik is also aware of how difficult life can be for a single parent.

"My mom takes really good care of us. She works really hard," Joey said.

Kayte Malik noted that she's comfortable with her current household structure because she's had several years to adapt.

"I think it's easier if the parents get divorced earlier in the child's life," said Kayte.

Her brother supported that viewpoint by relating the story of a friend who, after his parents divorced last year, began picking on people. "He was going through a lot of stress, I bet," Joey said.

Yet Laurie Cromis, 15, from Assumption in Fairport, said she feels a certain emptiness due to her parents' separation at the time of her birth.

"I've really never known what a father was," she remarked. "My friends will say, 'We're going somewhere with our dad,' and I'll say, 'I don't know what it's like, but have a good time!'"

Lisa Kelleher, 14, feels fortunate to have what Laurie feels she's missed out on. Lisa's mother divorced when she was 3, but remarried seven years later. Lisa's stepfather is Johan Engstrom, youth coordinator at Brighton's Our Lady of Lourdes Church.

"I think it's really cool to have a dad," Lisa commented. "Now I go, 'Hey, cool. Now can you say my dad' when referring to her stepfather in conversation."

Although Lisa has adjusted to the changes in her life, K Assumption has found the job a bit tougher.

Kasha admits that her parents' divorce — which occurred five years ago — has hampered her ability to get a job.

"I think it's going to be a little harder because I always think they're going to get a boyfriend in two years."

Church of the Assumption is working on rounding intimacy.

"Marriage and family are a lot more patient and understanding people than I was 10 years ago but are not legally divorced."

On the other hand, Assumption's

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