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Your child and life's reality

By Dr. Douglas Berger, M.D., Ph D. | [ASK THE EXPERT](#)



QUESTION:

I am a divorced mother of a 16-year-old daughter. I am very concerned that she has no “real” friends and spends too much time on the computer blogging when not doing school work. I suspect that my daughter had taken the divorce hard when her father left us five years ago. Her school grades have deteriorated and she has a strong resentment for her father. In fact, I discovered some scribbled hate notes about her father on a scratch paper when I last cleaned her room. I am so concerned that she failed to pass her exams this year and does not have a clue as to what might be the solution. Her father and I are worried that she does not even want us to take her to a psychiatrist. Could something be wrong? *Yuka*

It seems clear the daughter is upset about the family breakup, and ostensibly about her dad, but we don't know enough about her relationship with her mother yet. We also don't know if there is something else also going on in her personal life as teenagers often have lots of challenges in relating with their peer group, although the problem seemed to start at the same time as the divorce.

An important question is whether the daughter's reaction is only psychological nature, i.e., anger at the dad, reaction to losing the relationship with her dad who may have also been a difficult, etc., or if she has also developed some physical symptoms like sleep and/or appetite disturbance, or concentration and/or energy problems suggesting an illness of depression compounding the situation.

It would be pertinent for the mother to confirm if she is thinking about suicide or not. Hopefully the mother can convince the child to get mental-health help, especially if the child has the physical symptoms as mentioned above. Being 16 years old, it may not be so easy to force her, but with the hate notes and failing school, the family should try to rally around the child. The child's

behavior itself may actually be a call for the family to get together and regroup, and the more she ups the ante, there is some likelihood the father will get more involved in the child's life again. I would certainly recommend this as a start.

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The discussions herein are meant as general information and advice only. Each person needs to make their own personal life decisions and to contact a mental health professional for consultation if deemed appropriate.

