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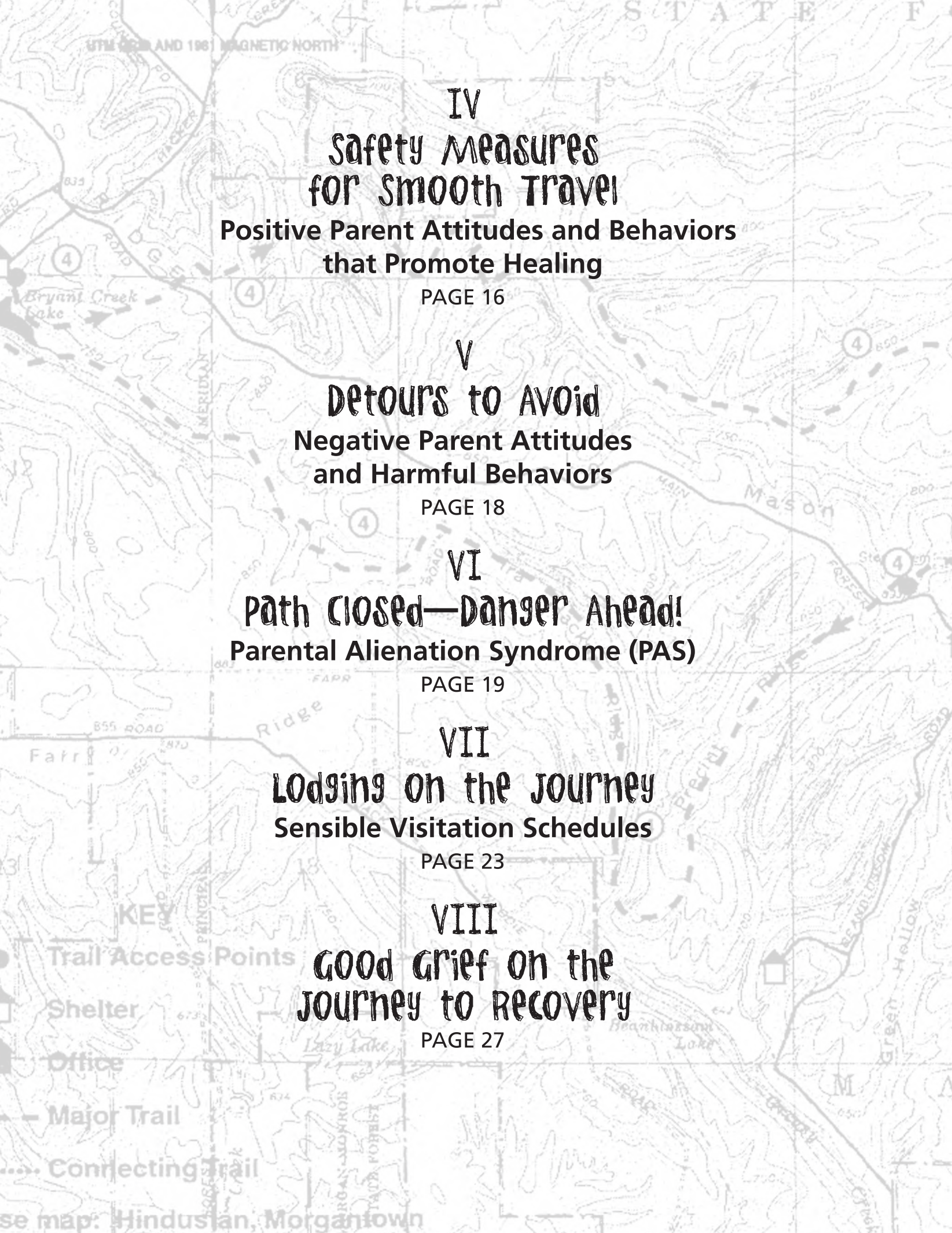
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KEY

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the many children of divorce and separation that I have counseled over the years. They have taught me so much that has been included in this book. Their courage, faith, and strength have been an inspiration to me.

Also, this book is dedicated to my wife, Louise, Beth Rabon and Phillip Rodgers for their hours of work and patience in editing this manuscript!

Introduction

This book is intended to provide encouragement to children and teens who are going through the difficulties and challenges of family changes. Across the land, half of our youth experience the effects of their parents divorcing. Divorce and separation represent new territory to be explored. This uncharted territory can be overwhelming and dangerous if proper plans and provisions are not made. On the other hand, proper preparations and a well thought out plan allow for “safe travels through the divide.” *Safe Travels Through the Divide* is specifically written to guide children, teens and the adults who love them safely through this arduous journey. Best wishes as you put the ideas and principles of this book to good use!



HOW to use this book

This book is divided into two sections. Section One is primarily written for concerned adults. This section is for parents and professionals who are trying to encourage and help children through parental divorce or separation. Specific tips are provided in this section that help adults foster a healing environment for kids and teens. In addition, a deeper understanding of the effects on children and teens from family changes is provided along with specific parent attitudes and behaviors that make all the difference in how well young people progress through this difficult time. These ideas are carefully culled from the latest research on the family and divorce or separation. Please make every effort to follow through on your part as adults. The ideas in this section can and will promote “safe travels through the divide.”

Section Two is primarily for kids and teens, although parents and helping professionals can discuss and encourage the use of the ideas provided. The information is mainly geared for grades 3-8. This information, however, can be easily adapted for younger or older children. The ideas are kid friendly and proven to be successful. General advice is given that applies to all kids going through family changes followed by 28 very specific problems that children and teens of divorce or separation may face. Good discussion questions and tips are provided for each of these specific situations. Also, an individual plan for coping with family changes is included at the end of the book.



section one

Mainly for Adults

safe 
Travels
Through the Divide

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se map: Hindustan, Morgantown



I NEEDSITIES for the Trip

The Twelve Items Needed for Children of Divorce or Separation (CODS) Before Leaving Home

When going on a long journey, important items are packed and taken along for the trip. Similarly, separation and divorce is often a long and ever changing journey for children. Having the necessary items for this journey makes the trip safer and more comfortable. The last thing parents want is to have their child or children feel miserable or get hurt on this unpleasant journey through parental separation or divorce. Below are twelve essential attitudes or behaviors that all kids need from their parents in a separation or divorce situation. Parents, please make sure your kids have access to all twelve necessary items for a safe arrival down the road.

1. To know that he/she is loved by both parents.
2. To have regular and frequent contact by both parents.
3. To be encouraged to love and enjoy time with both parents.
4. To be told what is happening (the basic facts) without hearing about adult issues and blame.
5. To be taught and reminded of the 3 C's of divorce and separation:
 - I didn't cause it. (It's not my fault.)
 - I can't control it. (There's no way I can change it.)
 - I can cope with it! (I can go on with my life.) (Frank, 2007)
6. To be allowed to grieve the loss of a parent and the loss of life as he/she knows it.
7. To have parents who listen and answer questions in a simple but factual way.
8. To be encouraged to "RAS" his/her feelings.
 - **R**ecognize or know that feelings are normal.
 - **A**ccept that all feelings are OK.
 - **S**hare feelings with ones who will listen and care. (Frank and Smith-Rex, 1996)

continued on next page

9. To be spared from hearing arguments and negative comments about either parent.
10. To have parents respect each other and get along when together with their child or children. (This includes during drop offs/pick ups, school events, sporting events, social activities, etc.).
11. To be allowed to be a kid—not a counselor, confidante, messenger, or spy for his/her parent(s).
12. To be given hope that this time will pass and that it can be OK someday.





II communication on the journey

Conversation makes a trip more enjoyable and helps the time go by. In the case of kids going through family changes, their parents would do well to listen to their thoughts and feelings. Below are heartfelt ideas and actions that kids want their parents to know and do. Dr. Kim Leon, a human development and family studies expert, shares these thoughts:

What I Need from My Mom and Dad A Child's List of Wants

- I need both of you to stay involved in my life. Please write letters, make phone calls, and ask me lots of questions. When you don't stay involved, I feel like I'm not important and that you don't really love me.
- Please stop fighting and work hard to get along with each other. Try to agree on matters related to me. When you fight about me, I think that I did something wrong and I feel guilty.
- I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I spend with each of you. Please support me and the time that I spend with each of you. If you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to take sides and love one parent more than the other.
- Please communicate directly with my other parent so that I don't have to send messages back and forth.
- When talking about my other parent, please say only nice things, or don't say anything at all. When you say mean, unkind things about my other parent, I feel like you are expecting me to take your side.
- Please remember that I want both of you to be a part of my life. I count on my mom and dad to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.

Source: Leon, K. (2004). *Helping Children Understand Divorce*. Columbia, MO: M. U. Extension Publications.



III The Traveler's Rights on the Journey

The Children of Divorce or Separation (CODS) Bill of Rights

As citizens of our great nation, we have certain rights as well as responsibilities. To ensure individual rights, our country's founders wrote the Bill of Rights. These rights are honored in every state as we travel. When children or teens travel through the new territory of parents separating or divorcing, certain rights are to be kept or honored as well. Children and teens should be encouraged to politely but firmly speak up when their rights are disrespected or disregarded. Parents, please teach your children the ten traveler's rights on the road through your divorce or separation.

1. I have the right to love and be loved by both of my parents.
2. I have the right to have the support of both my parents including their time, talk (counsel), and treasure (financial support).
3. I have the right to **not** be put in the middle of adult problems (spare me from arguments and badmouthing each other).
4. I have the right to **not** be put in a position of messenger, spy, counselor, or friend for either of my parents.
5. I have the right to have frequent and regular involvement of both my parents in my life.
6. I have the right to be treated as a person—not a thing to be fought or bargained over.



7. I have the right to **not** be forced to choose sides or feel guilty. (Please don't ask me, "Who do you want to live with?")
8. I have the right to have decisions made about me to be based on **my** best interests—not based on parents' needs or angry feelings.
9. I have the right to know that what happened is between my mom and dad and does not have anything to do with me. It is not my fault.
10. I have the right to ask for help if I am struggling with my parents' divorce. (Relatives, friends, teachers, school counselors or a therapist can help me through this time.)

