

# Children and Divorce

## Helping your child through a divorce

A divorce or separation is a stressful experience. Kids often become angry, confused, and some may even feel guilt. Separation and divorce are often a difficult transitional time. The key to helping your child is to be an active listener. Being an active listener helps your kids **cope** and adapt to new conditions.

- ✓ Structure, routines, and schedules provide dependability, stability, and security.  
Providing stability and a listening ear can lessen the hardships of divorce or separation.

Parent support, a listening ear, and stability help kids navigate divorce — feeling secure loved, and confident—closer bond to both parents.

## What your child wants from mom and dad during a divorce

- I need both of you to stay involved in my life. Please call me, email, text, 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 each other so that I don't have to send messages back and forth between you.
- When talking about my other parent, please say only kind 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 in 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: *University of Missouri*

## How to tell kids about divorce

Don't freeze in emotions. Prepare to tell your kids about your divorce. Plan carefully an outline of what you'll be telling them.

Tips to Help:

- **Honesty:** Be respectful of your child's feelings and the other parent.
- **Calm:** Don't freeze in emotions, prepare to tell your kids about your divorce. Plan carefully an outline of what you'll be telling them.
- **Truth:** Your kids are entitled to know. Prepare simple statements, not long-winded explanations, you may only confuse them.

Example: "We don't have the same interests anymore." You may need to remind your children that the family unit is not breaking up.

- **Security:** Let your children know that your love for them hasn't changed and you support them.

Example: I love You. I'm still your mother/father, here to support you and help you in. ....

**What to expect:** Let your kids know what to expect, address change, questions about changes in their lives. Your kids must not be put in the middle of your divorce or separation.

- **Do not blame or vent.**
- **Parents remain parents.** Reinforce over and over, a kid has both parents —and stick to it.
- **Prepare discussions.** Make plans to talk with your children before any changes occur. And plan to have conversations with your spouse is present, if possible.
- **Respect.** Be respectful of the other parent.

## What Information to Share with a Kid During Divorce

You must keep your child away from upsetting high conflict. A divorce or separation can turn your world upside down. Recognize that it's OK to have stirring emotions. Going through a divorce transition has a rule of thumb in discernment, *how will the information affect them?* Planning to talk to your children must be well thought out.

Below are tips to help.

- **Age:** The younger your child is the fewer details to share. Keep details simple, regardless of children's ages.
- **Truth and honesty** are best when talking about changes with your children.
- **Logistics:** Kids need to know basic logistics such as: Where will they be living? Will there be any changes in schools or planned activities? Do not overwhelm a child with changes. However, keep a child up to date on basics to know what to expect.

Keep a Kid in the role of being a Kid

- ✓ Let kids know they're not at fault.
- ✓ **Support the other Parent.** It is important to reflect the other parent positively to your child.

- ✓ **Be Supportive.** Kids often show confusion or misunderstandings, be patient.
- ✓ **Give Security, reassurance, and love.**

**Security** comes by being supportive. Your words, actions, and ability to remain consistent reassure your children of your unchanging love.

## **Learn How to Provide Stability Through a Divorce**

The comfort of Awareness, Security of Routines

Help your kids adjust to change by providing a sense of the same structure to their routines in their daily lives. You don't need rigid schedules to be the same but creating similar routines at each household and consistency provides stability and gives your kid a sense of calmness. Kids feel safer and more secure when they are informed up to date to know what to expect. An example is to continue the same set of rules, discipline. Keep routines same, after dinner homework, etc.,

## **Don't Spoil Them**

Resist the temptation to allow kids to break rules. Do not spoil your kids.

## **Caring For yourself through a Divorce**

Your balance (stability) in your emotions will reflect on your child's adjustment level. It is important to take care of yourself going through a divorce.

## **Divorce Coping Tips**

- Exercise
- Eat a healthy diet
- Friends, Peers
- Seek support

See a therapist If you are having problems handling your emotions such as intense anger, fear, grief, shame, or guilt. A professional can help you with adjustment and how to cope with those feelings.

## **Plan- well-being of your Child**

Remember, your child is your focus. Preparing to talk to your kids about divorce should be well thought out. Stay calm with your emotions, remind yourself you both want the best for your

child. Your focus is to **consider the well-being of your child**. How well a child adjusts to divorce depends upon a reflection of your adjustment.

### **Professional help for kids following divorce**

Everyone deals with stress differently. It's normal for kids to show a wide range of emotions. However, it is best to know what to expect,

join a group of other parents to help you with support, and help you recognize when to call a professional.

### **Normal reactions to divorce or separation**

Below is a list of normal emotions for children following divorce.

- **Anger**
- **Fear**
- **Anxiety**
- **Sadness**

### **Red flags for help**

Watch for these warning signs of divorce-related symptoms in kids:

#### **1. Frequent Outbursts**

Kids might display outbursts of anger and erratic behavior. If you find your child is exhibiting uncontrolled emotions seek support. Comfort them and let them know that you're in it together.

#### **2. Self-Harm**

Self-harm is not limited to a specific age. Any suggestion of self-harm warrants professional assistance.

#### **3. Trouble Sleeping**

Distress symptoms manifest in insomnia or sleeping problems. When it becomes excessively seek support.

#### **4. Withdrawn**

A Kid becoming withdrawn, showing a change of interests this may be a sign of warranting professional help.

Changes of any kind are challenging — know that you can help your kids adjust to divorce or separation. Discovering your inner strength and learning new coping skills can help this adjustment period become easier.

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