

Kids & Divorce

By

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Divorce is hard on everyone, especially the children. They aren't part of the decision making process and often only find out about the decision to divorce after it's been decided by their parents. Depending on their ages, children can be ego-centric, which leaves them thinking they had something to do in causing the divorce or that they have the power to stop it from happening. Of course, neither is true. The kids do need to be heard and to have an opportunity to ask questions, express their feelings and be understood in an often confusing time.

Most parents want to protect their children from further emotional pain, but aren't aware of how their words and actions can contribute to it. Here are a few things to keep in mind as you and your children work to adjust to life amid a divorce.

*No matter how angry one parent is with the other, don't speak negatively about the other parent within earshot of the kids. Your kids are part of both of you. When you criticize their mother or father, you are criticizing part of who they are and someone they love. It hurts them. I once had a client who thought that by pointing out the other parent's faults her children would understand why she needed to divorce him. No, it only brought pain upon her children who saw their father's faults but loved him anyway. Kids need to be able to love and admire both parents as much as possible.

*It is best if the parents can communicate with each other and keep the kids out of the middle. Don't make them messengers. It is possible they'll forget to pass on something important, get the message mixed up or be afraid to deliver it in case it makes the other parent angry. Do them a favor and talk to each other in one way or another.

*Keep a schedule handy so everyone can see when they'll be with mom or dad. Note sports events, practices and school functions so kids of all ages can be prepared for what's coming. Even young children can understand it by using a calendar with stickers or brightly colored houses.

*Be on time for pick up and deliveries of the children. If you are running late or stuck in traffic, be sure to give the other parent a call. This will reduce the anxiety for all involved.

*Be aware of your emotional state and practice good self care. Kids pick up on your moods. They are like sponges that absorb the emotional atmosphere. Of course going through a divorce and dealing with a former spouse can be stressful, remember that it will pass, hug your kids and laugh when you can.

*Keep adult information private. Be mindful of your email and phone conversations with the other parent, especially when there is tension. Too often your kids overhear or have access to personal information that causes them distress.

*Keep your parental fights to yourself. Tell your kids you are working on it but don't go into detail.

*Accept that you have different parenting styles. One parent cannot control what goes on in the home of the other parent. It is best if there are similarities in household routines around bedtimes or expectations for homework, but this isn't always the case. Speak privately to your former spouse about these topics and hire a professional to mediate differences if needed.

*Back up the other parent. Because parents will have different rules in their homes, it's good if each parent can respond to complaints by saying something like, "I know you don't like it, but you must mind your mother/father while you are in their home." Of course this doesn't include abusive behavior that must be reported and intervened with.

*Be courteous with your children's other parent. You may have come to dislike this person but it is best for your kids if you can be civil. General politeness is better than sarcasm or malice any day.

*Be open to sharing the positive experiences in your marriage and in your children's lives. Share the funny or warm-hearted memories. There was a reason you were to drawn to the other parent. Try to recall the more innocent times/

*Share photos with your children of the other parent with them. Divorce often means not seeing one parent as much as they did in the past. Keep reminders of the people who love them where they can see them.

*Most importantly, assure your children that they had nothing to do with the divorce. They did nothing to cause it and could do nothing to stop it. It was not their responsibility to fix or make better.

*Offer your children an opportunity to visit with a professional. Just being in a calm, supportive atmosphere where they are understood and listen to can create healing all on its own. This is a place where they can freely express their confusion, anger and sadness without worrying that they'll upset their parents.