



Dealing with Divorce and Effects on Kids: How to Help Children Cope with the Family Changes

Parenting is a challenging proposition no matter what the situation, but when a divorce is taking place, parenting becomes an obstacle course. Not only are you dealing with your personal tragedy and are attempting to keep your life moving forward, but in addition to dealing with your crisis you can only guess how your child is being affected, especially when the divorce is less than amicable.

Making matters worse is the new parenting arrangement that forces the parties to the divorce to suddenly become master communicators about parenting, school issues, and of course the visitation schedule. In some cases the joint custody agreements that now make up the majority of shared parenting requests during divorces are extremely complex and complicated, determining the when and where of parenting down to the second.

If you find that you are in this maelstrom of chaos, sit back and go back to the basics. Here to help you is the divorcing parent's guide to parenting in a simple do and don't listing.

The Do's

- Maintain an open door policy with your children and make yourself available at all times to talk about the separation of living quarters between you and your spouse. Your children need to understand that they had no role in your decision to divorce and that they are not to blame for anything that happened.
- Children will need to work through the grief that comes from losing the family. This might cause the typical stages of grief, including bargaining, reasoning and anger. You may find that you are the target for these emotions. Remain calm, even if your children express anger, and remember that you are the adult in the room. While you do not need to justify yourself to your children, you should answer their questions factually, in an age appropriate manner.
- Stabilize the upheaval your children are experiencing. This is not the time to move them to a new school or daycare center, but instead it is the time to keep everything exactly the same, even if you need to drive out of your way to pick up your children.
- Set up a support network. Your children's teachers, caregivers, and other adults should know that you are divorcing and on the lookout for odd behaviors. This may also help them to make themselves available if your children need to open up to someone other than you.
- Involve your children in your plans. If you are thinking of moving, enlist your children's help in the process. Give them a lot of warning ahead of time so they can get used to

the idea. Anything that presents a change to their already upside down home environment should be discussed well ahead of the event.

- Listen closely to what your children tell you. No matter how small the matter may appear to you, to your child they may be of greatest significance, especially now that their living situation has changed completely.
- Come up with new family traditions and way of doing things. This provides a sense of continuity and also a sense of belonging.

Here are the Don'ts

- Refrain from speaking in negative terms about your former spouse. Remember that she or he is still your child's other parent, and no matter what you think about the person, your child still loves them dearly! Forcing your child to take sides will backfire on you, even if initially they side with you.
- Avoid using your children as messengers to your former spouse. If you have something to pass on, contact your former spouse or their attorney directly, but do not make your kids pass notes or carry verbal information back and forth. If it is a bad message, your children will be on the receiving end of the frustration!

Words to Live by

Truth be told, there is no easy way out of a divorce. Help yourself and your children to adjust to the new way of life with the help of a mental health specialist. In some cases it may take a bit of time for obvious behavioral outbursts to take place, but even if they are slow in coming, they are nonetheless virtually inevitable.

Remember that both you and your child are adjusting to the new living quarter, the environment, and the absence of the other parent. Individual and also family counseling may help everyone to move on.