

COUNSELING OF DIVORCE CHILDREN

How To Help Your Children In the beginning...

If possible, have both parents present when telling children about the divorce. Discuss what you will tell children before hand. Also, keep explanations simple and avoid placing blame. Use general statements such as Mom and Dad can't live together anymore or Mom and Dad have decided we would be happier living in different homes.

Tell your children that the divorce is not their fault. Children need to understand the decision to divorce had nothing to do with them or their behavior. Further kids should be told there is nothing they can do to change what is happening in the family nor is it their responsibility to fix the family.

Tell your children that you love them. Make sure they understand the love shared between a parent and child and is different than the love shared between a husband and wife. Kids need to know that the love you have for them will last forever.

Reinforce it is okay to love both Mom and Dad. Children should not feel they have to take sides or worry about losing the love of either parent.

Give children details regarding how life will change. Answer questions such as where they will live and with whom, when they will see each parent, where will the other parent be, how they can contact either parent, school arrangements, involvement in activities etc.

Tell children both parents will continue to be a part of their lives. Let children know what the parenting schedule will be and how they can reach each parent. Inform children that they can contact either parent when they feel they need to talk with that parent. Also, if one parent chooses not to be involved in a child's life, it is best not to be dishonest with your child or misrepresent the truth.

Minimize changes in your children's lives as much as possible. Such as neighborhood, friends, school, activities and contact with extended family members.

Inform school and teachers about changes in the family. Provide school with necessary information regarding the divorce such as who will be the primary contact, changes in emergency numbers, who will pick children up and when. Respect your children and remember to be discrete about details. This will also help you steer clear of the temptation to drag others into the drama of your divorce.

Forging ahead...

Continue to show your children you love them through both words and actions.

Listen to your children.

Support their right to have feelings about what is happening in their lives. Help your children find safe and healthy ways to express these feelings.

Role model appropriate ways to deal with feelings.

Find healthy ways to deal with you feelings and help your children develop safe ways to process their own feelings.

Re-establish a sense of security by providing structure, consistency as well as lots of love.

Children will wonder about the possibility of being divorced/abandoned by a parent (i.e. Are you going to leave me like you left each other?). Therefore keeping your word with children and following through with plans, as well as, promises are very important. Bottom line, don't just talk the talk; you also need to walk the walk.

Support your child's relationship with their other parent.

Children need a relationship with both of their parents. Remember, while a person may not be a good marriage partner, they can still be an excellent parent.

Work on re-establishing a sense of family.

Develop new family traditions, rituals or activities such as creating special ways to spend the holidays, getting a family portrait or planning a weekly family dinner night.