

Separation/Divorce: Helpful hints for parents!

Amy Cornell, School Counselor

1. Be open, receptive and non-judgmental to your child's feelings. It's natural for your child to be upset. It's helpful when your child can express their feelings in a safe way.
2. Tell your child that although you don't live together anymore, his/her mother and father will always be their parents.
3. Assure your child that the divorce is not their fault. Children often think they somehow caused it or could have kept it from happening.
4. Do not carry the stress of the divorce into your relationship with your children.
5. Let kids continue to be kids and not take on adult responsibilities.
6. Do not say bad things about a former partner in front of your child. Never ask your child to choose sides.
7. Communicate directly with your former partner. Carrying "messages" may put your child in the middle. Also, children should not carry money, legal papers, notes or requests between parents. Lastly, your child is not a spy, so do not pump them for information.
8. When homes are split, children should have their own space, clothes, and toys at both locations.
9. Both natural parents must be given respect in front of the child. Advise grandparents and extended family members not to say bad things about the former in-law in front of the kids.
10. The child has the right to love each parent without feeling guilt, pressure, or rejection.
11. Have a weekly routine that is predictable. Make a schedule on the calendar and be consistent.
12. Have consistent boundaries and rules in each home.
13. Be sensitive when dating. Children of separation/divorce are vulnerable to fears of abandonment or betrayal.
14. When it is your time with your child, spend it doing meaningful activities to create special memories and closeness.

Parent Handout:

12 TIPS FOR PARENTING THROUGH DIVORCE

1. Take time to reassure your children that they are not to blame for the divorce. Children often feel that it is their fault. They think that if they had behaved better then perhaps mom and dad would not have argued and divorced.
2. Be aware of the different feelings children facing a divorce often have. They may feel: sad, angry, guilty, afraid of the unknown, scared, or worried. It is normal and natural to have many different feelings about the separation / divorce and the changes. Help the child find appropriate ways to deal with these emotions.
3. Allow time for your child to talk about the separation / divorce and to ask questions. Explain the divorce to your children at least every six months. One explanation is not enough. With time, their ability to understand what you tell them will change, and they'll have new questions and concerns.
4. Remember that a child cannot take the place of the 'missing' parent. Do not expect the child to turn into a grownup overnight and don't treat them like a grownup — sharing grownup information. They are children and need to be allowed to play and be a child.
5. Resist the temptation to confide in your child. Don't expose your child to adult information such as intimate relationship details or financial concerns. You will need to talk about what's happening, so find adult confidants that you trust.
6. Don't allow your guilt to interfere with parental responsibility. Try not to be overprotective or overindulgent with privileges or using material things to compensate. It's important to set limits and provide structure. At such an unsettled time, consistency is especially important.
7. Discourage your child from taking sides. Refrain from making unkind remarks about your ex-spouse where they can hear you. Children usually take after both parents. So they may interpret a criticism of one of their parents as a criticism of them.
8. Don't use visitation or child support as bargaining tools with the other parent.
9. Don't make your child feel guilty about enjoying him / herself with the other parent.
10. Respect the privacy of your child's relationship with the other parent. Do your best not to ask too many questions when they return from a visit. Allow them privacy for phone conversations. And don't use the child to carry messages, letters, or checks to the other parent.
11. Try to help your child maintain a relationship with relatives on both sides.
12. Establish new traditions for holiday celebrations. More than any other times, holidays and birthdays remind kids that things will never be the same. Try doing something entirely different to celebrate the holiday. Choose something you enjoy too — the happier you are, the more likely that your child will be happy.

Remember...time heals...