



153 WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN DURING AND AFTER A DIVORCE

by Armand Velardo, Esq.

When parents become involved in divorce proceedings, the emotional impact on their children is usually brutal and long lasting. Parents can reduce the emotional impact on their children, by utilizing the following tips:

1. Attempt reconciliation.
2. If reconciliation is possible, do not hesitate to place the divorce proceedings on hold.
3. If reconciliation is possible, do not let your parents, other family members, or friends, keep you from attempting the same.
4. If reconciliation is not possible, do your best not to delay the divorce proceedings.
5. If reconciliation is not possible, quit having sex with each other, because such activity will only taint any resolution of the various issues when the sex stops.
6. Be honest with yourself, your spouse/ex-spouse, and your children.
7. If you are feeling down/depressed, take an inventory of the good things in your life; place your children first on the list.
8. Suicide is not an option. If you have thoughts of suicide, seek help immediately.
9. If your spouse/ex-spouse is abusing you and/or your children, seek help immediately.
10. Stop trying to figure out why your marriage did not work; after a certain point in time, it becomes counter-productive.

11. If you are experiencing a financial crunch during or after the divorce, do not dwell on it in front of your children; try to obtain a higher paying job, or a second job if necessary.
12. Utilize family counseling and individual counseling for your children and yourself.
13. If you and your spouse/ex-spouse cannot agree on a counselor for your children, you should each select a counselor, and then let such counselors select an independent counselor. The independent counselor should then decide on how the counseling sessions should take place; with parents, without parents, etc.
14. Do not make your divorce a public event; save the “dirt” for discussions with your counselor.
15. Put aside your pain and anger, and focus on the best interests of your children.
16. Make your children feel safe and loved at all times.
17. It is best if both parents, as a couple, inform their children of their decision to obtain a divorce, and that neither parent is at fault.
18. Listen to, and address your children’s concerns and feelings; let your children vent. Allow your children to ask questions; in answering your children’s questions, do not compromise your spouse/ex-spouse’s character, integrity, and reputation.
19. If your children are not interested or ready to talk about the divorce, be patient and wait until they are ready.
20. Explain to your children, as often as necessary, that they are not the cause of the divorce.
21. If your children side with your spouse/ex-spouse, do not hold it against them; try to put yourself in your children’s shoes; try to understand your children’s concerns/feelings.
22. Do not be reluctant to apologize to your children; apologize as often as necessary.
23. Both parents should inform the children’s counselors at school of their decision to divorce.

24. Be alert to signs of distress in your children (aggressiveness, depression, mood swings, loss of self-esteem, poor performance at school, etc.), and immediately attend to such distress and/or seek professional help.
25. Provide your children with emotional support, and do not expect them to replace the emotional support you previously received from your spouse/ex-spouse.
26. Play an active role in your children's school and other activities during and after the divorce proceedings.
27. If one of the parties is keeping the marital home in the property settlement, do your best to keep your children's bedroom sets, and as much of the other furniture, in such home; there is enough other things for your children to adjust to; like both of their parents not being under the same roof.
28. Allow your children to make some decisions with your new home so they feel a part of it; for example, where to place furniture and pictures.
29. Do not look at child support as an obligation, but as something that you want to pay for the benefit of your children.
30. Child support is for your children, do not agree to take a lesser amount to appease your spouse/ex-spouse, or as a result of pride.
31. Do not send your children to your spouse/ex-spouse's home in tattered clothes, or their pajamas, to force your spouse/ex-spouse to purchase additional clothing.
32. Do not have your spouse/ex-spouse served with court papers when you know your children will be present.
33. Be patient. If you have children and you and your spouse have settled all issues, it will take at least 5 months after the Complaint has been filed to obtain a divorce. If you and your spouse are having difficulty settling all issues, it could easily take 8 months to 18 months to obtain a divorce.
34. Stay focused on the big issues: custody, parenting time, child support, property settlement, and spousal support. Do not incur needless legal fees to argue, or fight over insignificant issues.
35. Control your attorney.

36. Do not have your attorney file motions to seek psychological evaluations of your spouse and children to simply gain leverage in the divorce proceedings.
37. Do not file for a personal protection order to gain leverage in the divorce proceedings.
38. Do not antagonize your spouse to commit an act of domestic violence to gain leverage in the divorce proceedings.
39. Call the police only when necessary.
40. Call Children's Protective Services only when necessary.
41. Do not make false allegations regarding emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse of your children; false allegations can never be taken back.
42. Do not withhold, or attempt to withhold, parenting time as a means to gain leverage in the divorce proceedings, or to hurt your spouse/ex-spouse during or after the divorce.
43. If your spouse is no longer residing at the marital home during the divorce proceedings, but is paying for the marital home expenses, do not intentionally "run-up" the bills (by running the sprinkler system and by heating the pool around the clock) to increase the expenses that your spouse will have to pay; this simply reduces the amount of money that can be spent on your children and other necessary expenses.
44. If a representative of the Friend of the Court will be interviewing your children with respect to their preference to reside with you or your spouse, do not attempt to prep or sway your children before the interview.
45. Do not have your children write letters to the Court, or the Friend of the Court, on your behalf.
46. Do not bring your children to the divorce proceedings unless requested by the Court.
47. Do not bring parents and/or other family members to the divorce proceedings.
48. Try to resolve your differences short of a trial, between yourselves with the assistance of your attorneys, or through the use of an arbitrator, facilitator, or mediator; a trial deepens/hardens anger and resentment.

49. Honor the agreements you reach with your spouse/ex-spouse regarding divorce issues and/or children issues; placing such agreements in the Judgment of Divorce will avoid confusion.
50. The Judgment of Divorce should contain a detailed parenting time schedule instead of leaving it open; you and your ex-spouse can always deviate from the schedule if you are communicating; it avoids the necessity of having to return to Court if you and your ex-spouse stop communicating.
51. Pay your child support.
52. Pay your child care expenses.
53. Pay your children's medical reimbursements to your spouse/ex-spouse.
54. Each parent should have as much parenting time as possible. Although it may be difficult on everyone, the parents should work toward a 50/50 split with respect to parenting time. The above may not be possible, if each parent lives in a different school district after the divorce, if the children have been abused by a parent, etc.
55. Discuss parenting time with your children only when both parents are present.
56. Spend as much time with your children as possible; never refuse extra parenting time.
57. Parenting time should be exercised on a consistent basis, without long gaps between visits with your children. Show up, and do not be late, for all scheduled parenting time.
58. If you cannot see your children on a consistent basis, you should telephone, write, e-mail, text message, send cards, etc., on a consistent basis.
59. Do not agree to a parenting time schedule that separates your children.
60. Do not agree to a parenting time schedule that is initiated by your children. Under this arrangement, the parent that does not have physical custody of the children will only have parenting time when the children initiate the same. This arrangement gives the custodial parent the opportunity to convince the children to be indifferent or hostile toward the non-custodial parent. This arrangement also gives the children too much control/power over the non-custodial parent. The above may not be applicable if the children have been abused by the non-custodial parent.

61. A shorter distance between your home and your spouse/ex-spouse's home will allow for more flexibility with respect to parenting time; will make it easier for the parents to fill-in for each other; will make it easier for the non-custodial parent to attend the children's school and other functions; etc.
62. Avoid treating your children like a guest in your home; include them in family activities such as making dinner, doing the dishes, cutting the lawn, etc.
63. Avoid structuring every moment of parenting time around an activity or event; a majority of parenting time should involve everyday life.
64. To the extent you can afford it, have clothes and toiletries for your children at both of your homes.
65. If your children need something during or after the divorce proceedings when you are engaging in parenting time, obtain it for them if possible, and work out the economics with your spouse/ex-spouse at a later time.
66. Be flexible with your spouse/ex-spouse as far as parenting time; fill-in for each other when necessary.
67. Do not argue in front of your children.
68. Do not discuss your bedroom issues in front of your children.
69. Do not attempt to convince your children that your spouse/ex-spouse was the cause of the divorce; they will make their own assessment, if they feel the need to do so, as they grow older.
70. Do not attempt to influence your children to be indifferent or hostile toward your spouse/ex-spouse; this is one of the worst forms of child abuse.
71. Never make comments to your children that compare them to your spouse/ex-spouse in a negative way.
72. Never, for any reason, resort to physical violence with your spouse/ex-spouse, or children.
73. Do not abandon your children no matter what hurdles are placed in front of you by your spouse/ex-spouse.
74. Do not talk about custody with your children.

75. Do not talk about child support with your children.
76. Do not talk about the division of property with your children.
77. Do not talk about spousal support with your children.
78. If you are entitled to spousal support, do not turn it down out of pride, accept it, save it, and utilize it to assist your children with college and other expenses.
79. Do not discuss the Court proceedings and rulings with your children.
80. Do not leave any paperwork regarding the divorce in any place at your home where your children will be able to find and read it.
81. If the marital home is being sold as part of the property settlement, do not have your children present when such home is being shown to potential buyers.
82. Do not have your children present when you are moving furniture and other belongings out of the marital home.
83. Do not damage your spouse/ex-spouse's property; it sets the wrong example for your children because they will eventually find out about it.
84. Do not ask your children what your spouse/ex-spouse is doing.
85. Do not ask your children what your spouse/ex-spouse is spending money on.
86. Do not use your children to forward bills or messages to your spouse/ex-spouse.
87. Do not have your children lie for you.
88. Do not fight for extra parenting time simply to reduce child support.
89. Do not threaten your spouse/ex-spouse that you will stop seeing your children if you have to pay child support and child care expenses.
90. Do not over-dramatize your children's deficiencies or illnesses, in an attempt to increase spousal support, because you would rather stay at home instead of also contributing economically to your children.

91. Do not think that you are punishing your spouse/ex-spouse by not exercising parenting time with your children; you are only punishing your children.
92. Do not withhold parenting time because child support is late.
93. Do not pass on a better career opportunity to avoid paying higher child support.
94. Do not convey to your children that you are unable to purchase an item because your spouse/ex-spouse is not paying child support or other expenses, or because you are paying child support and other expenses.
95. Do not give gifts to your children with restrictions. For example, if you buy your child a bike, do not force your child to keep it at your home if he/she wants to bring it to your spouse/ex-spouse's home.
96. Do not let your differences keep you and your spouse/ex-spouse from both attending special events in your children's lives; graduations, weddings, etc.
97. Do not tell your children that they are a "mistake" ("Dad did not want you" or "Mom did not want you").
98. Do not talk badly about your spouse/ex-spouse in front of your children.
99. Do not talk badly about your spouse/ex-spouse to family, friends, or third parties.
100. Do not allow your family, friends, or third parties to talk badly about your spouse/ex-spouse in front of your children.
101. Do not allow your family, friends, or third parties to control the decisions you make with your spouse/ex-spouse regarding your children.
102. Do not allow your family or friends to move into the marital home during the divorce proceedings; it simply adds to the turmoil in most cases.
103. Do not shower your children with gifts to win them over; during the divorce proceedings, all gifts should be from both mom and dad.
104. Do not fake an illness, or dramatize a health issue, to obtain your children's attention and/or sympathy.
105. Do not allow your children to play you and your ex-spouse against each other.

106. Start new traditions with your children.
107. Allow your children to express their love for your spouse/ex-spouse in your presence, and allow your children to have pictures of your spouse/ex-spouse in their rooms.
108. As your children become older, realize that parenting time and responsibilities may have to be altered to meet the changing needs and schedules of your children.
109. Do not make your children feel uncomfortable when you are exercising your parenting time and they want to contact (via phone calls, e-mails, or text messages) your spouse/ex-spouse. Do not check the previous call listing on your children's mobile phones to see how many times they contact your spouse/ex-spouse when you are exercising your parenting time.
110. Do not make your children feel uncomfortable, when they are leaving your home so your spouse/ex-spouse can exercise parenting time.
111. Be civil to your spouse/ex-spouse when he/she is picking up your children to exercise his/her parenting time; do not make your spouse/ex-spouse pick your children up at the curb, at other family member's homes, the police station, or other establishments, because you cannot be civil with one another.
112. Do not interrupt your children's time with your spouse/ex-spouse by excessively contacting them when they are with your spouse/ex-spouse.
113. Figure out a way to be friends with your ex-spouse; try to forgive and forget; you will be parents for life.
114. Try to develop a degree of trust with your spouse/ex-spouse when it comes to issues surrounding your children.
115. Establish a game plan with your spouse/ex-spouse to solve issues surrounding your children; at a minimum, meet alone on a quarterly basis; limit the time of the discussion; stick to the issues; do not bring up the past; try to compromise and come to a resolution, etc.
116. Never stop communicating with your spouse/ex-spouse about your children's educational, medical, religious, and daily issues.
117. If you and your ex-spouse cannot reach an agreement on issues concerning your children after the divorce, consider a counselor, mediator, or

parenting-time coordinator who will decide issues after each parent presents their respective views; a counselor, mediator, or parenting-time coordinator will be quicker and cheaper than using the Courts.

118. If you utilize a parenting-time coordinator, make sure that the parenting-time coordinator is qualified; make sure he/she has children of his/her own.
119. If you cannot communicate directly with your spouse/ex-spouse regarding divorce issues and/or your children, use e-mails and text messages to communicate.
120. Attempt to coordinate your children's routines (activities, homework, curfew, bedtime, etc.) with your spouse/ex-spouse while they are with each parent.
121. Have your children's report cards sent to you and your spouse/ex-spouse.
122. You and your spouse/ex-spouse should exchange copies of any schedules regarding your children's school activities, dates of parent/teacher conferences, etc.
123. You and your spouse/ex-spouse should encourage your children to follow the household rules where they are residing.
124. If your children are sick or injured during your parenting time, contact your spouse/ex-spouse as soon as possible.
125. Be supportive of the other parent's role; do not criticize his/her career, the location of his/her home, size of his/her home, etc.
126. Encourage your children to have a good relationship and to spend time with your spouse/ex-spouse; even after your children become adults.
127. If your children are upset with you spouse/ex-spouse, do your best to calm them down.
128. If your children have a complaint about your spouse/ex-spouse, encourage them to bring it to the attention of your spouse/ex-spouse.
129. Assist your children in buying cards and gifts for your spouse/ex-spouse.
130. Do not knowingly schedule your children's special events on days that your spouse/ex-spouse will be out of town so as to keep your spouse/ex-spouse from attending.

131. Coordinate with your spouse/ex-spouse with respect to gift giving for your children's special events.
132. Do not schedule extracurricular activities for your children if they interfere with your spouse/ex-spouse's parenting time unless you obtain their prior consent.
133. If your spouse/ex-spouse has yearly events that they attend with your children, do your best to plan/alter your parenting time so as to not interfere with such events.
134. Support and promote your children's relationships with your spouse/ex-spouse's parents (grandparents), brothers (uncles) sisters (aunts), nieces and nephews.
135. Allow your spouse/ex-spouse or their family members to assist in watching your children while you are at work to reduce child care expenses.
136. If a relative asks your child to assist with a project, make sure the relative speaks with your spouse/ex-spouse, if assisting with such project impacts your spouse/ex-spouse's parenting time, or if you think your spouse/ex-spouse might not approve of your child assisting with such project.
137. On occasion, have breakfast, lunch, or dinner with your spouse/ex-spouse and children; give your children a sense of family, even if it is for a short period of time.
138. Move on with your personal life; do not live in the past.
139. Continue to be an adult and parent after the divorce; there is no need to act like a teenager.
140. Let your children know when you are dating, and do not forget about your children when you are dating.
141. Take your time (approximately 1 year) before you introduce a new girlfriend/boyfriend to your children; make sure that the relationship is a serious one before introducing your children to the new girlfriend/boyfriend.
142. When you introduce a new girlfriend/boyfriend to your children, inform your spouse/ex-spouse first so your children do not feel caught in the middle; so they do not feel they are hiding something from your spouse/ex-spouse.

143. When you introduce a new girlfriend/boyfriend to your children, keep it from being a big production.
144. If your new girlfriend/boyfriend/spouse has children, do not place such children ahead of your own children; emotionally or otherwise.
145. Make sure that your children are not the last ones to know that you are planning to remarry.
146. Before you remarry, clearly discuss your future spouse's expectations and role with your children; do not allow your future spouse to replace, or attempt to replace, an active and supportive biological parent.
147. Before you remarry, protect your children's inheritance via a will, trust, pre-nuptial agreement, etc.
148. After you remarry, start new traditions; but do not discard the old traditions, and continue to reserve some time to be alone with your children.
149. Only the biological parent should punish the children. The step-parent should not attempt to impose his or her will, but should conduct him or herself in the same manner as an aunt or uncle.
150. Do not allow your new spouse to take the lead (or be put in the middle) when dealing with your ex-spouse regarding issues that deal with your children.
151. Support your children's relationships with your ex-spouse's new spouse and step-children.
152. Cooperate, compromise, and respect each other.
153. Remember, your children are always watching and listening; set a good example for them.

The author welcomes readers to forward this article to parents involved in divorce proceedings; he also welcomes readers to forward additional tips to his attention so this article can be supplemented based on the experiences of others.

Armand Velardo is a shareholder at Ruggirello, Velardo, Novara & Ver Beek, P.C., which is located at 65 Southbound Gratiot, Mount Clemens, Michigan 48043. Mr. Velardo's practice focuses on family law, business planning, estate planning, personal injury, and commercial litigation. Mr. Velardo has a B.S.B.A. from Wayne State

University, a J.D. from Wayne State University, a LL.M. in Taxation from Wayne State University; and he is also a Certified Public Accountant. Mr. Velardo can be contacted at (586) 996-4006 (office phone), or at (586) 918-3380 (cell phone), or via e-mail at av@armandvelardopllc.com.

© 2013, Armand Velardo, Esq., All Rights Reserved.