

KIDS AND DIVORCE

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Parenting Tips While Going Through Divorce

Parents don't want to hurt their children. Few *intend* to do damage but it happens when parents are unaware of the impact that their actions or words have on their kids. Because divorcing people are in pain, in transition and in temporary chaos, they may be momentarily self-absorbed and distracted. At a time when children need reassurance the most, parents may be unaware of their needs during this particular time. In order to help our children adapt to a separation or divorce we need to keep a few things in mind. Keeping this in mind helps create a child-centered divorce. Children are the innocent and powerless victims who will deal with the consequences throughout their lives.

You will be connected forever

Adults must realize as soon as possible that unless one parent decides to withdraw from his or her child, parents will be in touch with each other forever as co-parents and may eventually become co-grandparents. A divorce only dissolves the marriage, not the entire family, as if it had never existed.

Working towards peace between you and your (ex)spouse will save years of stress and add to the quality of life for everyone. You *can* create change by monitoring your own behavior.

Intergenerational Boundaries

It is critical to maintain an intergenerational boundary between adult problems and children. Please protect your children's innocence and allow them to remain children. They must not be burdened by adult problems. Kids don't have the coping skills or the intellectual ability to understand money worries, adult relationship issues or their parents' unhappiness. Children have their own grief

and worries about the divorce as well as their own developmental tasks to accomplish. They need protection from grown-up worries.

Transitions

Children often experience high stress when they are moving from parent to parent. They worry about the parent they are leaving, they grieve that their family isn't living together and they may be asked to report on the life of the parent they just left, which can provoke an unpredictable parental reaction. It's especially important not to argue with the other parent at this time. Interactions should be cordial and relatively brief. Kids should not be asked to carry the child support check or messages back and forth. Parents need to handle issues between themselves, protecting their child's innocence.

Flexibility and Divorce Agreements

While a divorce agreement is necessary and important, a spirit of flexibility and cooperation between parents will affect daily life for adults and children in important ways. Life throws us many curves and it's impossible to predict them years in advance. We all need extra help from time to time so it's reassuring to know that our ex-partner will lend a hand when necessary. Obviously, this has to go both ways—what goes around comes around.

Moving from a nuclear family to a bi-nuclear family

The notion of a "broken family" is outdated and a debilitating way to view divorce. A bi-nuclear family setting is created by parental cooperation and encouraging children to be "at home" in two places, without competition or the need to report on what happens in the other home. Living within a few miles of each other makes life easier on both parents and children.

The quality of parenting can suffer while going through divorce. Read as much as you can about protecting your children. See *The Intelligent Divorce* by Mark Banschick and *Helping Your Kids Through Divorce the Sandcastles Way* by Gary Neumann.