

Helping Children Cope with Divorce

Raising children can be complex and confusing, and in the face of obstacles, such as divorce, it can be even more challenging. What do you say to comfort them? How do you keep your guilt hidden? How much do you tell them? What do you say? How can you hide your anger towards their other parent to keep them from becoming part of the conflict? These are just some of the important questions that arise for parents during separation and divorce. First of all, it is important to remember that children are much more perceptive than we think, so if you're wondering if they're aware of the marital discord, they probably are. Openly discuss the impending divorce. Tell them that "Mom and Dad are moving to separate homes," explain where the kids will stay and when, and assure them that they will still get to see each parent, just not together anymore. This open communication will keep them from becoming anxious about the unknown (What's happening to Mom and Dad? What's going to happen to me? Did I do something wrong?), and encourages them to talk about their questions and feelings throughout the divorce and transitional time ahead. Keep it simple, and be honest. Don't make promises that won't be kept, be realistic with them that the transition is going to be difficult for a little while, and don't place blame on either parent for the divorce. Keep the adult issues away from the children's ears, they've already heard enough most likely. Each child will react differently when told this news, some will cry, get mad, withdrawal, or have questions you don't have answers to. It is okay to say, "I don't know." In the following weeks and months, it is important to pay attention to how your child is adjusting, look for new behaviors, and keep the communication open. Suppressing their feelings can be damaging to them and your relationship with them. Seek counseling for yourself on how to handle this transition the best you can for your family, and find a counselor for them to talk to about things they are not comfortable talking with you about or don't know how to handle.

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