

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS DURING SEPARATION OR DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS

No matter how well parents think their children are adjusting to a divorce, it is traumatic for them. They feel the same strained emotions, uncertainties, and tensions as you do, but have the added factor of being torn between two loving parents. How a child reacts during this stressful time could have a significant impact on the remainder of his or her life, whether the child is now 2 years old or 18-years-old.

The following suggestions are made to help you and your children cope with the stress of divorce.

1. Think first of your children's present and future emotional and mental well-being before acting. *This will be difficult* because of your own feelings, needs, and emotions, but try, try, try.
2. Maintain your own composure and good emotional balance as much as possible. Remember it is not the end of the world. Laugh when you can and try to keep a sense of humor. What your children see in your attitude is, to some measure, reflected in theirs.
3. Allow yourself and your children time for readjustment. Convalescence from an emotional operation, such as a divorce, is essential.
4. Remember the best parts of your marriage. Share them with your children and use them constructively.
5. Assure your children they are not to blame for the breakup and that they are not being rejected or abandoned. Children, especially the young ones, often mistakenly feel they have done something wrong and believe the problems in the family result from their own misdeeds. Small children may feel that some action or secret wish of theirs has caused the trouble between their parents. Explain to them there are other children whose parents have been divorced and that they will not lose their mom or dad.
6. Continuing anger or bitterness toward your spouse can injure your children far more than the divorce itself. The feelings you show are more important the words you use. Do not voice criticism of the other parent. It is difficult, but necessary. For the child's healthy development, it is important for him to respect both parents.
7. **Do not force or encourage your children to take sides.** To do so encourages frustration, guilt, and resentment.
8. Try not to upset the children's routine too abruptly. Children need a sense of continuity. It is disturbing to them if they must cope with too many changes all at once.



329 Couch Street Suite 332
Portland, OR 97232

Main: (503) 755-1546 | Fax: (503) 212-0711

9. A divorce often leads to financial pressures on both parents. When there is a financial crisis, the parents' first impulse may be to keep the children from realizing it. Often, they would rather make sacrifices themselves than ask the child to do so. The atmosphere is healthier when there is frankness and when children are expected to help.
10. Divorces are as hard on the children as their parents. The children may not always show their distress or realize at first what this will mean to them. Parents should be direct and simple in telling children what is happening and why, and so a child can understand and digest. This will vary with the circumstances and with each child's age and comprehension. The worst course is to hush things up and make a child feel he must not talk or even think about what he sees is going on. Unpleasant happenings need explanation, which should be brief, prompt, direct, and honest.
11. The guilt parents may feel about the marriage breakdown may interfere in their disciplining the children. A child needs consistent control and direction. Over permissiveness or indecisive parents, who leave a child at the mercy of every passing whim and impulse, interfere with a child's healthy development. Children need and want to know clearly what is expected of them. Children need leadership and sometimes authority. Parents must be ready to say "NO" when necessary.
12. Do not overlook that you are only human and admit it. You cannot make a 100% score on being a perfect parent (no one ever does, even in good times). When you fail in your attempts, acknowledge it, and resolve to improve day-by-day.
13. Read and reread these basic guidelines. Add to them by writing down your own constructive, positive approaches to handling your new way of living. Discuss your thoughts and feelings with others you trust and feel comfortable with and benefit by sharing their positive attitudes.



329 Couch Street Suite 332
Portland, OR 97232

Main: (503) 755-1546 | Fax: (503) 212-0711