



WAYS TO TALK TO CHILDREN

Discussing Divorce

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

Discussing Divorce

Attempting to explain a concept that ultimately can change the family and home dynamic is a topic that most parents find overwhelming.

Divorce can be filled with heightened emotions, many of which you are likely processing and attempting to manage yourself, on top of probably figuring out logistics and a new daily life and routine. Additionally, divorce is an abstract concept for younger children, and so you may find it challenging to know how to navigate the topic without causing more confusion or upset. We have put together some information to assist you in navigating an experience like this.

General Guidelines for the Conversation

Every family situation is unique. Reasons for divorce vary and each child's response will be different. There is no "perfect" approach! In delivering the news, ensure you provide lots of reassurance and love. It may be an emotional experience for all, but keeping some of the following in mind may support a more positive outcome for the family as a whole.

- **Prepare your conversation.**
- Select a **time** of day (not near bedtime) and **safe space** to hold the conversation.
- Use an **empathetic tone** and open body language.
- **Tell the truth**, in an age-appropriate way, using an agreed-upon reason or message.
- **Limit sharing inappropriate details** and information that may overwhelm the child.
- **Avoid blaming**, even if there is a clear right versus wrong.
- **Pre-empt questions** and prepare answers as best as possible.
- Provide the child/ren an opportunity to talk and **prioritize listening**.
- Help the child/ren **name their emotions**.
- Remind the child that he/she is not at fault.
- Many children, especially younger ones, have "magical thinking". Reinforce that the decision made is independent of their thoughts or actions and that they did not "cause" the divorce.
- **Be patient.** Understanding this concept and how it will impact the future, will take time to grasp.
- Present as a "**united front**" where possible.
- **Provide reassurance** as often as is needed, especially that both parents love and care for the child, even if home circumstances have changed.
- Verbalize messages of **love, care, and support**.
- Use **physical connection** and proximity to show care and concern - hugs help to calm the nervous system.
- Provide as much **stability, structure, and routine** as possible - even if it's simply relying on the daily routine to remain the same.
- **Do not use your child as a confidant** for your emotions or concerns.
- Explain that **change is best** for the whole family and things will feel better in time.



Signs that Additional Support is Needed

Please note that changes can be expected in response to an emotionally overwhelming experience such as divorce. Anger, confusion, hopelessness, anxiety and mild depression are all very normal and expected responses initially and with support they will lessen and improve over time. However, should these persist or worsen, it is recommended to seek counseling services.

- Mood swings/emotional outbursts
- Constant worry/anxiety
- Changes to sleeping/eating habits
- Poor concentration/memory
- Irritability/angry outbursts
- Decreased academic performance
- Withdrawal from friends/family
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Self-harm or expressed harm-ideation
- Drug/alcohol use and abuse

Coping with Divorce

Coping with your divorce can be overwhelming.

Taking care of yourself means that you'll be in a better position to support and look after the wellbeing of your children. Seek professional support; maintain a healthy diet; prioritize physical exercise; rely on your support system; practice healthy emotion expression and find ways to bring fun/play into each day.



Children's Books about Divorce

Books and stories can help increase a child's understanding, provide verbiage for self-expression, normalize the experience, and encourage the development of adaptive coping-skills. Using stories can be helpful for when you, as the parent, find the words and explanations a challenge.

- **Dinosaurs Divorce: A Guide for Changing Families** by Laurene Krasny Brown and Marc Brown. Ages 4-8
- **I Don't Want to Talk About It** by Jeanie Franz Ransom. Ages 4-8
- **My Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Anymore: A Drawing Book For Children of Separated or Divorced Parents** by Judith Aron Rubin. Ages 4-12
- **What Can I Do? A Book for Children of Divorce** by Danielle Lowry. Ages 8-12

- **It's Not your Fault, Koko Bear** by Vicki Lansky. Ages 3 to 7.
- **Two Homes** by Claire Masurel. Ages 3 to 7.
- **The Invisible String** By Patrice Karst. Ages 3 and up.
- **My Family's Changing** By Pat Thomas. Ages 4 and up.
- **Divorce Is Not the End of the World** By Zoe and Evan Stern. Ages 8 and up.
- **Mom's House, Dad's House for Kids** By Isolina Ricci. Ages 10 and up.



Scan for Resources



www.centerforchildcounseling.org

Telephone: 561-244-9499
www.centerforchildcounseling.org