

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN COPE WITH DIVORCE

Divorce often results in children feeling overwhelmed by the losses and changes they are experiencing. It takes time to adjust, and the time needed varies from child to child. Parents can help their children cope with divorce.

Children Need Predictability

- Children who can maintain regular routines are less likely to be overwhelmed by the changes divorce brings. Parents should do their best to build and maintain healthy and smooth environments.
- Children need frequent and regular contacts with both parents.
- Parents should be on time for the exchange of children for time-sharing. This sets a good example for children and does not disrupt children's routines.
- Children need continued contact with friends and relatives of both parents.
- Children need personal space to call their own, even if it is just a corner.
- Parents should exercise caution when introducing new boyfriends or girlfriends to children. Children often feel confused about their sense of loyalty, and parents' casual relationship may contribute to children's sense of insecurity and instability.

Children Need Relationships with Parents

- A parent needs to stress the good points about the other parent and avoid name-calling, saying bad things, or blaming the other parent for problems.
- A parent should keep family photos available, including photos of the other parent.
- A parent should allow children to express their love for the other parent and talk about their experiences with the other parent.
- If children complain about one parent, the other parent should encourage children to take the complaint to the person responsible rather than agree with the children. A parent has no control over the other parent.
- A parent should encourage the other parent's involvement in the children's school or other activities and advise of parent/teacher conferences, provide report cards and give other information pertaining to the welfare of the children.
- A parent should assist children in buying cards and gifts for the other parent.
- Parents should telephone, write, make tapes and send cards if they are not able to see their children regularly.

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Children Should be Kept Out of the Middle

- Parents should talk directly to each other about child-related information parents need to discuss. If talking is not possible, communicate in writing. Children should not be used as messengers.
- A parent should not ask children what goes on in the other parent's home. This is a violation of children's trust.
- Parents should not argue in front of the children.
- Parents should manage their feelings, and if they cannot, they should end the conversation until they are able to do so.
- Parents should never expect or encourage their children to take sides.
- If children tell a parent that the other parent lets them stay up late or lets them eat sweets for dinner, a parent should tell children that they must follow the rules of the household and that the other parent cannot be told what to do in his/her home.
- A parent should not withhold the children from the other parent or refuse to pay child support. Children should not be used as weapons to get back at the other parent.

Children Need Parents as Adult Role Models

- Parents should use common courtesy and be civil and business-like in their dealings with each other.
- Parents should not jump to conclusions before getting all the information.
- Parents should follow-up agreements, in writing, about vacation dates, trips to the doctor or dentist, and changes in time-sharing to avoid confusion and double scheduling.
- Parents should negotiate with one another about changes in time-sharing or responsibilities for the children that each parent will assume. Negotiation requires giving and taking by both parents.
- Parents should recognize that as children grow and develop, time-sharing and parents' responsibilities may have to change to meet the changing needs of the children.
- Parents should not allow their past conflicts to interfere with present decisions regarding children.

Resources <http://lancaster.unl.edu/family/COPEDBooklist.pdf>
http://helpguide.org/mental/children_divorce.htm
<http://www.pbs.org/parents/itsmylife/resources/divorce.html>
<http://www.childrenanddivorce.com>
<http://lancaster.unl.edu/family/COPEDBooklist.pdf>
<http://www.childcentereddivorce.com/free-resources/websites>
http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/families/divorce.html

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2011 PAM Organizers' Packet, Prevention Network, 800-968-4968 or www.preventionnetwork.org