



The Champion

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Recovery for Children of Divorce

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When children are made aware that divorce is becoming a reality, their number one need is to feel secure and blameless. Their world – seemingly beyond their control – is toppling and, more than you suspect, they are probably aware of the history of arguments and growing loss of affection.

Address Their Needs

They desperately need you to help reduce their trauma with reassurances that...

- It is not their fault.
- The divorce is between both parents, not parents and children.
- They will be safe in terms of home money and school, or more surprises.
- You will love them no matter what.
- You want to hear their feelings.
- You will tell them what's going on that concern them.
- You can't fix everything.

These are the basics of safety during divorce recovery for children. Whether children are young, adolescent or adult, they are part of a divorce process. Their emotional involvements need to be addressed and shouldn't be minimized, despite the difficulties involved. Very often the children aren't informed that the parents' divorce is in the offing. Including them early in the separation lets them get used to the idea gradually, reducing shock. They need ample assurance that your love for them is secure and can't go away. Children are especially emotional about divorce, but studies show they are also resilient after it occurs.

Communicate Right From The Start

When the first steps toward divorce are taken, we need to be able to tell our children that things are not going well between us or our spouses, tough as it may be. This will give the children a chance to grieve appropriately for their changing family. Although it is not a pleasant prospect, it is one that we should not try to prevent. Prolonging the news until the last minute and then suddenly confronting the child with the physical realities of the split is more of a shock. Explain to the child what is happening and in words that children can understand; all the details don't have to be spelled out. Be honest about your feelings. Tell them that you, as parents, are not agreeing about many things and you no longer love each other in the same way you did before.

Affirm Your Love for Them

Find ways to affirm your children on a daily basis. Maybe you can say to them, "I love you just the way you are." And, "I cherish the fact that you are with me as we all go through this together."

Support one another. Saying, "You are the most important thing in my life right now" will win a response you need. Continue to let them know they are cherished and loved and that our feelings for them are not going to change.

Some Signs of Success in Divorced Hoes with Happy Kids

1. *Children are encouraged to form their own non-biased opinions* of all parents and step-parents. Parents neither sugarcoat nor blame the other parent.
2. *Parents encourage expression* of anger, hurt, loneliness, fears and tears from the children.
3. *Scheduling conflicts are handled by parents*, and children are not put in them middle of the stress and strain
4. *Children have role models of happy relationships*. Each parent either provides this with a new partner or spends time with the kids and other families where these relationships exist.
5. *Each parent affirms each child's self-worth* as often as possible to reinforce the reality that divorce ends a marriage, not the parent-child bond. Children of all ages need to hear:
 - I'm glad you are my son/daughter.
 - You are special.
 - I like spending time with you.
 - I love you.
6. Parents keep good boundaries about their own divorce concerns. Many family therapists believe that 80% of parents' personal business is none of the children's business. Too often children will take on responsibility for what they know. Most of a parent's stress and conflict does not need to be known by the child.
7. Parents don't try to do everything for their children. Children do not need super-parents. This only causes inadequacy and role modeling that creates anxiety.
8. Parents keep a sense of humor. Children need help in knowing there are at last two sides to everything. They need to help to develop their sense of humor and to "lighten up. Seeing that their parents can be happy, whether single or post-divorce, is an inspiration.

(Excerpted from "Life After Divorce: Create A New Beginning" by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse)

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A Few Truths About Infidelity

By Esther Bird, MA, LPC, LMFT, LCDC

- Infidelity deprives us of achieving the highest level of marital and family satisfaction.
- Infidelity can drain marriages of time, emotional intimacy, economic resources and sexual exclusivity.
- Infidelity makes it difficult for parents to support each other in providing a nurturing home for their children.
- Infidelity ultimately undermines our ability to give children the best possible chance at a secure future.
- A happy marriage is not a guarantee against infidelity.
- The person who had a lapse in fidelity may not be giving enough at home rather than not getting enough.
- It is normal to be attracted to another person, but fantasizing about what it would be like to be with that other person is a danger sign.
- Infidelity is not only about love or sex. It's about knowing how to set proper boundaries in social interactions and being respectful of your committed relationship.
- You do not have to have sexual intercourse to be unfaithful. Passionate kissing or oral sex is a violation of your commitment to your partner.
- Emotional affairs are characterized by secrecy, emotional intimacy and sexual chemistry. They can be more threatening than brief sexual flings.

How to 'Affair Proof' Your Relationship

- **Maintain appropriate social boundaries.** Avoid emotional intimacy with people you find attractive. Resist the desire to rescue an unhappy soul who pours his/her heart out to you.
- **Don't go over the line with Internet friends.** Never exchange sexual fantasies with anyone but your partner.
- **Recognize that work can be a danger zone.** Don't lunch privately or take coffee breaks with the same person all the time. When you travel with a coworker, meet in public spaces, not in a room with a bed.
- **Protect your marriage by discussing relationship issues at home.** Resolve to be open, honest and caring with your partner.
- **Make sure your social network is supportive of your marriage.** Surround yourself with people who are committed to their relationships.

(Excerpted from "Not Just Friends" by Shirley Glad, Ph.D.)

Verse of the Month:

**"...do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
Ephesians 6:4**

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Effects of Divorce on Children

By Sally Etheredge MEd, LPC

Children of different ages respond in various ways to the divorce of their parents.

- Toddlers (ages 2 to 4) may show signs of regression. They become more dependent and engage in "babyish" behavior like reverting back to wanting someone else to feed them or wanting diapers even though they are potty trained.
- Children (ages 5 to 8) may also regress. This age group tends to take responsibility for the marriage breakup. They experience fears of abandonment, loss of sleep, and a deep sense of sadness and a retreat into fantasy. Some authorities believe this is the most critical age for children to experience divorce.
- Older children (ages 9 to 12) express anger as the dominant emotion. Children may alienate those closest to them, including teachers and close relatives.
- Teen years (13 and over) can be deeply hurt and resent their parents for getting divorced. They feel the loyalty dilemma – keeping peace with both parents can be emotionally draining.

(Excerpted from "Children & Divorce: What to Expect, How to Help" by Archibald D. Hart, PhD.)

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