

# **HELPING YOUR CHILDREN COPE WITH DIVORCE**



Split a film about divorce for kids (trailer)



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# Telling Your Kids About the Divorce



- Both Parents should talk to the kids together when possible.
- Explain the divorce in a simple way. Do not overcomplicate it.
- Be Age-Aware. Normally, younger children need fewer details and will do better with less information, but older children may need more information.
- Keep it Real. Be open and honest. No matter how much you tell your kids, keep it truthful.
- Talk about feelings. Talk about the way kids naturally feel during a divorce. Let them know that their feelings don't have to be the same as what you're feeling.
- Tell them you love them. Keep telling them over and over again. Make sure they understand that you will never stop loving them.

# Your Child Needs Reassurance

- Continually reassure them that the divorce is not their fault. Children are naturally egocentric which could cause them to think that the divorce is somehow their fault. They may think that the marriage is ending because of something they did or did not do.
- Reassure them that they will always have both parents in their lives. When parents divorce sometimes children feel as if they are losing one parent.
- Explain how the living arrangements will work. Do tell them the logistics of how it will work. But do not give too many details that are overwhelming..
- Reassure them that they don't have to handle the divorce on their own. Tell them that both parents will be there to love, support and listen to them. Remind them they always have extended family, like grandparents, to help them too





# Do Not Make Your Child Choose Sides



“Most kids will suffer for a short time after a marriage ends, but what exacerbates and extends their stress and anxiety is when they feel torn between two parents.”

-Tamara Afifi UCSB Communication Researcher

- **Avoid talking badly about the other parent or blaming them, even if you are angry.** Children love and need both of their parents. If one parent starts talking badly about the other it creates a loyalty conflict within the child.
- **Respect the child's relationship with the other parent.** Encourage and support this relationship. A healthy relationship with both parents is what is best for your child.
- **Don't be critical of the other parent.** Accept that your ex will do things differently than you, but it doesn't make it wrong. If your child hears this criticism it makes them feel torn between parents.
- **Don't put your kids in the middle or relay messages for you.** Your child is not your middle man, talk to your ex directly.
- **Keep your kids out of it, don't pull your children into arguments.** This will make them feel like they have to choose sides and create more stress for them.

# Be a Good Co-Parent

- Make a co-parenting plan with your ex and then keep your commitments.
- If you and your ex have joint custody:
  - Refer to both places as home. "Your home with mom and your home with dad."
  - Do not use the term "visit" or "visitation" when talking about time with their other parent. Instead, talk about time with mom or dad.
  - Create a special place in each home for your children
  - Provide children with a set of everyday items in both home.
- Stay involved in your child's life with calls and texts when you're not with them.
- Keep your promises!!!
- Remember you can not ever be replaced as your child's parent!

- Helping your children identify, understand and express their emotions is an important part of their coping with the divorce.
- Make sure you allow your child to talk about their other parent around you.
- Help your children identify their emotions by name. If they are young you could have an emotion chart to help them recognize how they are feeling. You could also use the chart to talk about different times when they have felt a particular emotion.  
For example: "Tell me a time when you felt\_\_\_\_\_."
- Your child needs to know it is okay for them to express their feelings. An activity you can do at dinnertime or at bedtime is where each member of the family talks about the highs and lows from their day.

For Example:

- **Low:** A opportunity for the child to express the hardest or worst part of their day.
- **Example:** "I didn't get to talk to Dad on the phone today and really miss him."
- **High:** An opportunity for the child to share the best part of their day.
- **Example:** "Mom bought me ice cream today after school to celebrate the 100 percent I got on the spelling test!"

(Brosi et al., 2019)

# Helping Your Children Understand Their Feelings





# Activities to Help Toddlers and Young Children Understand Their Feelings

**Match.** Make faces out of paper with removable facial features cutouts. Make a variation of shapes for eyes and mouths so the child can practice different pairings and name the emotion they make with the facial features.

**Draw the Emotion.** Have the child draw out the emotion they are feeling. Discuss the drawing with the child. Sometimes just expressing the emotion on paper and getting to talk about it safely is all the child needs. You can also use paint, playdough or other creative objects you have around the house. Talk about the different colors they used and what feelings fit with the colors.

**Feeling Box.** This works great for anxiety. Allow the child to draw or write down things they worry about and place them in the “feelings box.” The child can call their box whatever they like, but the idea is to put their worries in a safe place so they can take a break from thinking about them. Allow children to decorate their box how they like.

(Brosi et al., 2019)



# Activities to Help Older Children and Teens Understand Their Feelings

**Masks.** Draw a picture of a mask (or find one online and print it out). Have the child draw the feelings on the front of the mask they let others see. Now, flip the mask over and have them draw feelings that they might hide from others, or do not like to show others. Discuss these things with them.

**Charades.** Use the feelings chart to write down various feelings on pieces of paper. Just like traditional Charades, without talking, each family member acts out a feeling and allows the others to guess.

**Body Reflections.** Talk about where the children specifically feel their emotions in their bodies. Then talk about how ‘much’ they feel the sensation on a scale of 0 (none at all) to 10 (a lot).

**Music.** Have your teen find different songs that evoke various emotions.

**Conversation Starters.** Use conversation starters to explore feelings with your child.

- Example: “Sometimes I worry about\_\_\_\_\_.”
- Example: “How can your family show you they love you?”
- Example: “What were you doing the last time you felt really happy.”

(Brosi et al., 2019)



# Book Resources About Emotions for Children and Teens

While reading books, point out to the child the emotions the characters of the book are experiencing at various times in the story. This allows them to recognize emotions and encourages empathy toward others.

## **For Younger Children**

*Listen to My Body* by Gabi Garcia and *Niko Draws a Feeling* by Robert Racza.

## **For Older Children and Tweens**

*The Feelings Book: The Care and Keeping of Your Emotions* by Dr. Lynda Madison and *Coping Skills for Kids Workbook: Over 75 Coping Strategies to Help Kids Deal with Stress, Anxiety, and Anger* by Janine Halloran.

## **Teens**

*A Still Quiet Place for Teens: A Mindfulness Workbook to Ease Stress and Difficult Emotions* by Amy Saltzman, MD. and *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life for Teens: Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills for Helping You Manage Mood Swings, Control Angry Outbursts and Get Along with Others* by Sheri Van Kijk, MSW.

(Brosi et al., 2019)

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