

# How to help your child cope with divorce

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A divorce is stressful on the entire family, but it's especially tough on your children who have to work through a ton of feelings and adjust to a very different life than they're used to. Yet experts agree that with some proven strategies, you can help them heal and pull through. Here are seven.

## **Be honest.**

"Parents set the tone in the way that they explain a family transition to their children, according to Risa Garon, a licensed clinical social worker and the executive director and co-founder of the National Family Resiliency Center. Garon said children feel that they're cared for and included when you can explain in a child-appropriate way that you're getting a divorce and how it's going to affect them. Plus, it's also a good idea to explain in simple terms the reason you're getting a divorce because kids, regardless of their ages, often think the divorce is their fault.

## **Consider their feelings.**

"One of the largest problems is the loss of a picture of a family that children knew and felt secure about," Garon said. Understand that your child may have a set of feelings that are completely different from yours. They might feel shock, denial, anger, and sadness and experience worry and anxiety. They might also feel isolated, alone, and afraid. Young children can benefit from reading books about divorce and drawing pictures about their feelings, and tweens and teens can benefit from music with lyrics that talk about change.

## **Keep life normal.**

A divorce brings about so much change: new home, new school, and a new way of life, but you can make it less traumatic for your child by making sure the other parts of his life are as normal as possible, according to Karen Buscemi, author of *I Do, Part 2: How to Survive Divorce, Co-Parent Your Kids, and Blend Your Families Without Losing Your Mind*. It's best for your child to continue to participate in the same activities, see the same friends, and even stay in the same school if possible. Also, children need structure and discipline, so both parents should agree to keep the same bed time, chores, and rules.

## **Stay connected.**

Custody arrangements and visitation can be tough on the child so it's important for the parent who has the child most of the time to encourage he or she stay connected with the other parent when they're not together. Set regular times for phone calls or video chats, email, or texts.

## **Don't bad-mouth your ex.**

Divorce can bring out a lot of negative emotions and hurtful words, but no matter what you would like to say about your ex, don't do it within ear shot of your kid because "the children feel like a piece of them is being belittled and berated and taken away from them," according to Garon. Plus, your children will always remember what you said about the parent they love. Instead, vent to your family, friends, or a therapist.

## **Work together.**

The more decisions you can make before going to an attorney—custody, visitation, financial matters—the easier it will be for you and your child, according to Buscemi. Once the divorce is finalized, a great way to make co-parenting run smoothly is to work together to raise your child and pitch in when your ex can't do a drop off or go to the school play, for example. A Google calendar can help everyone be on the same page and know exactly who is responsible for what and when. "If you are flexible, that's going to give your ex reason to be flexible in return," Buscemi said.

**Get support.**

Garon says just like a wedding is an event and a marriage is a process, divorce is a major family transition that takes time to heal. And one of the best ways to help your kids cope is to surround yourself with caring family, friends, and colleagues who have your family's best interests in mind. Individual counseling, educational programs, and school groups can also help your child feel not so alone in the process.

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