

Top Tips for Helping Kids With Divorce

Speak to Your Child About Divorce

Make time to speak to your child about the divorce and use simple language that they will understand. Be prepared to answer your child's questions and be as honest as you can. Help them understand that the divorce is not their fault, that they are still loved by both parents, and that even though there will be changes, they will still get to spend time with both parents.

Help Your Child Talk About Their Feelings

Give your child opportunities to talk about how they're feeling, and if they open up to you, given them your undivided attention. As a parent it can be distressing to hear your child talk about feeling sad, but avoid jumping in to 'fix it' and avoid encouraging your child to push bad feelings away ("don't be sad"). Giving your child space to talk will help them let go of their feelings. Try to remain calm – if your child can see you're distressed they might not come to you again.

Help Your Child Understand Their Feelings

Some kids will struggle to put their feelings into words and their distress will manifest behaviourally instead. If you notice changes to your child's behaviour you may need to help them find the words to talk about their feelings – "I wonder if you're yelling because you're upset about the divorce. We can talk about your feelings, but throwing things won't help the feelings go away"

Stick to Your Child's Routine

Children cope better when they have a stable routine and a sense of predictability. Come up with a routine that everyone agrees on, and stick to it. If you have younger children, make a picture calendar so they're never in doubt of where they're staying or who they'll be with.

Spend Quality Time with Your Child

Having special one-on-one time will help you maintain a strong emotional bond with your child, and it will also send a clear message to them that although the family is breaking up, you will always be there.

Keep Setting Limits + Boundaries

Children need firm and loving limits in order to feel safe and in control. Boundaries and discipline are still as important as they were before. Being consistent with your child will help them to feel more secure.

Keep Things Neutral

Avoid making negative comments about your spouse in front of your kids and don't use them to pass on messages, no matter how trivial. Putting your child in the middle will increase their distress.

DIVORCE

Nearly 50% of Australian marriages end in divorce and few end amicably. Separation and divorce is an extremely stressful time for families and while most kids adjust well, some develop emotional or behavioural difficulties.

Younger children in particular are at higher risk for developing adjustment problems because they have lesser developed coping skills and a limited ability to understand changes in their family unit.

Your child may not talk to you about their feelings after a divorce, even when asked directly. They might not be able to put their feelings into words or they may avoid expressing themselves to protect you.

Non-verbal signs of distress include:

- Sleep problems
- Poor concentration
- Disrupted appetite
- Increased clinginess
- Unexplained physical symptoms
- Loss of interest in activities
- Spending more time alone
- Trouble at school
- Increased behavioural problems

This tips sheet covers strategies for helping your child adjust to divorce.

If you're child's difficulties persist speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist

