

DIVORCED DADS

10 Tips to Help Your Child Through Divorce

by Lois V. Nightingale, Ph.D.

Helping your child through your divorce may be one of the most difficult tasks you will ever face as a parent. The following is a brief list of practical tips that can help as you walk through this difficult time with your child.

1. Be honest. Don't lead your child to believe "dad's away on business" or "everything is going to be wonderful". Children are very perceptive. They know if a parent is trying to hide something, even if the purpose is to spare their feelings. Children need simple straightforward answers they can understand, without blame or making anyone wrong or bad.
2. Let your child know it is not their fault. All children assume they may be responsible for their parents' breakup. Children need to be gently reassured repeatedly over the first couple of years that the divorce is an adult decision having nothing to do with them or their behavior.
3. Listen quietly. Children have many questions, feelings, assumptions and concerns about divorce. Many parents find it difficult to just sit quietly and listen to their children talk without trying to interrupt with a "fix-it" statement. Children need to feel heard with quiet patience and undivided attention.
4. Let your child know however they respond to the divorce is O.K. Many children hide their feelings of sadness, grief, anger or confusion because they are afraid expressing these feelings will upset their parents. Children need to know all their feelings are acceptable.
5. Let your child know it is normal for them to want their parents to get back together again. Children can feel ashamed about this very normal wish. You can explain to your child that once divorced, it is very unlikely that people ever get back together, but their wish for reconciliation is very normal.
6. Reassure your child of personal safety. Many children are concerned if their parents divorce there will not be enough food or shelter or clothing for them. Children living with single mothers may also need reassurance that she has a plan to protect them in case of fire, "burglars" or "ghosts".
7. Ask your child about friends of theirs whose parents are divorced. This is a good way to learn of your child's fears and assumptions about divorced parents, and gives you the opportunity to clear up any misconceptions and remind them that other children have gone through what they are now going through.

8. Don't put your child in the middle or try to make them take sides. Don't say anything about your ex in earshot of your child. Don't have your child carry messages to your ex. Children need to be able to love both parents. If one parent is disapproving of affection a child expresses toward the other parent, the child will begin to withdraw, become dishonest or depressed.

9. Spend time with caring friends. Having a supportive network can protect your child from becoming your confidant and feeling responsible for your emotional well being. It can also give you a higher frustration tolerance for the normal everyday things kids do.

10. Read together and talk about a book on divorce for children. This will help you explain important facts to your child and help your child formulate questions they might otherwise not have words for. A wonderful interactive book to read with your child is *My Parents Still Love Me Even Though They're Getting Divorced*, written by Dr. Lois V. Nightingale, a Clinical Psychologist, for children and their families. More about this book can be found at www.nightingaleroose.com.

For further information on this topic you can read:

My Parents Still Love Me Even Though They're Getting Divorced: An Interactive Tale for Children By Lois V. Nightingale