

# How to Talk to Your Kids about Divorce

## **SOURCE: How to Talk to Your Kids about Really Important Things**

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How you and the other parent handle the initial breakup, both with the children and with each other, will have a significant influence on how well your children adjust to the divorce. Here are some recommendations for minimizing separation anxiety and other negative emotional effects of divorce.

## When to Tell

### **Wait Until Physical Separation is Imminent**

One or two weeks notice is best. Too much notice causes unnecessary stress about if and when one parent will leave. No warning generates even more stress and separation anxieties about the other parent leaving as well.

### **Break the News at Home, When There is Plenty of Time to Talk**

Give the children time to grasp the news, to ask questions and to cry while you are there to comfort and reassure them.

## How to Tell

### **Break the News Together**

This eliminates the chance of conflicting stories. More importantly, it communicates that both parents will be staying actively involved in their lives.

### **Tell All Your Children at the Same Time**

This creates a family connection that helps cushion the shock and allows siblings to be a source of comfort and support for each other. Afterwards, you may offer older children a more detailed explanation.

### **Be Straightforward**

Don't lie or make false promises. An honest and unwavering explanation will convey the finality of the decision.

## What to Tell

### **Assure the Children of Both Parents' Love**

Try "Sometimes parents stop loving each other, but they never stop loving their children." or "We will always be your mommy & daddy. We will always love you and we will both help take care of you until you are grown up."

### **Relieve the Children of Blame**

Children do not need to know the painful or "adult" reasons for the divorce; they do need to be convinced that the divorce is not their fault, and that they are not responsible for fixing the relationship between the parents.

### **Communicate the Finality of the Decision**

Let them know that you have tried to work things out and that you have put a lot of thought into the decision. If the children push for details, tell them your reasons are just between the parents.

### **Explain the Life Changes that Will Follow**

Living arrangements, schedule of time with each parent, how parents will both continue to care for the child

## **General Do's and Don'ts**

### **DO's**

Be clear that the separation is permanent

Encourage children to ask questions

Remember repeated conversations help children comprehend the news

Talk again about feelings and concerns as children's needs and ages change

### **AVOID**

Blaming the other parent

Badmouthing the other parent, especially in earshot of the child

Asking the children to choose sides

Trying to trivialize the child's loss with comments like, "Oh, you never saw that parent much anyway."

Turning to your children for emotional support - Call an adult friend

Using phrases like "Be brave" or "Show us how grown-up you are" which expect children to repress their emotions about the separation

### **Other Resources**

Helping Children Cope with Divorce, By Edward Teyber

Mom's House, Dad's House: (Making Shared Custody Work), By Isolina Ricci

Divorce Book for Parents: Helping Your Children Cope with Divorce and its Aftermath, By Vicki Lansky