

Tips for Divorcing Parents

1. Give your children permission to love BOTH of you
 - Remember your child is a part of both of you.
 - Your feelings for the other parent do not have to be the way the children feel.
 - Give your children permission to enjoy themselves with the other parent.
 - Give your children permission to relax and enjoy themselves when you are both at the same event.
 - Let your children know that you will be okay and that they do not have to worry about you.

2. Keep adult issues away from the children
 - Do not discuss issues such as court, finances, child support, infidelity, or other significant relationships with your child or with someone else when your child can overhear.
 - Any issue or subject that you would not have discussed with your children prior to the divorce are issues that you should not share with them now.
 - Do not put your children in the middle of your conflict.
 - If you find that you are “defending yourself,” then you are probably putting the children in the middle.
 - Assure the children that the divorce is not their fault and that both mom and dad will always love them.
 - Don’t blame the other parent for the divorce (even if it’s “true”).
 - Answer children’s questions with a focus on how the divorce will affect them. Keep it age-appropriate. They don’t need the details, even if they think they do.
 - Design ways to communicate with each other that don’t involve the children as messengers ... phone, fax, email, in person, attorneys, note in diaper bag.
 - Develop and maintain a business-like relationship with the other parent.
 - Keep the emotionality of the divorce out of communications in front of the child.

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3. Respect each other's role in your child's life
 - Children do best when both parents are involved in their lives.
 - Children do best when parents do not engage them in their conflict and do not put them in situations where they witness parental conflict.
 - Don't speak negatively about the other parent *to* the child or to someone else when the children can overhear.
 - Don't engage in speaking negatively about the other parent *with* the child...Suggest the child talk with the other parent directly and/or just listen to your child.
 - Each parent is in charge of his or her time with the child. Don't schedule appointments (i.e. dental/medical) during the other parent's time or expect the other parent to enforce your consequence for misbehavior without prior discussion.
 - Honor the role of extended family.

4. Develop a parenting time schedule.
 - Stick to the plan as much as possible.
 - Be on time for all exchanges. Clearly communicate any necessary changes as soon as possible.
 - Make exchanges child focused. Do not discuss divorce issues at exchange time.
 - Help your children prepare for the transition...emotionally and physically.
 - Allow your children to carry items from home to home.
 - Help your children develop a routine to go from each of their homes..... pack their items, homework, stuffed animals, etc.
 - Support the child's extra curricular activities. Take them to all of their events. Do not forget to attend their events, even when the event does not fall on your parenting time.

5. Take care of yourself
 - Develop a support system for yourself and your children.
 - Find people you can talk to about your feelings and frustrations....NOT the kids
 - The children can be WHY you get through this in a healthy way, but not HOW you get through it.
 - Your job is to take care of them, not their job to take care of you.
 - Find friends, family, support groups, counselors, and/or churches that can support you through this difficult time.