

Coping with Divorce: What Parents Can Do to Make It Easier For Their Kids

Work at staying together. The first thing I'd say about divorce- do everything you can to work at staying together. This means seeking help individually and as a couple. Sometimes a temporary separation helps, while still working on issues together. That being said, many people have made all attempts to work things out, but can't.

For many people, divorce marks a turning point in their lives, whether you're the adult or the child. Statistics suggest around 50% of first marriages divorce.

Not the kids fault. Did you know it's common for kids to think their parents' divorce is somehow their fault? Some kids feel guilty about what happened, or wish they had prevented arguments by cooperating more within the family, doing better with their behavior, or getting better grades. It is important to communicate to kids that separation and divorce are a result of a couple's problems with each other, not with their kids.

It's common for kids emotions to change frequently, too. They may feel stressed out, angry, frustrated, or sad. They might feel protective of one parent or blame one for the situation. They may feel abandoned, afraid, worried, or guilty. They may also feel relieved, especially if there has been a lot of tension or fighting at home.

Keep the peace. Dealing with divorce is easiest when parents get along. Kids find it especially hard when their parents argue or act with bitterness toward each other.

Be fair. Most kids say it's important that parents don't try to get them to "take sides." Kids need to feel free to hang out with and talk to each parent without the other parent acting jealous, hurt, or mad.

Keeping in touch. Going back and forth between two homes can be tough, especially if parents live far apart. Making an effort for kids to stay in touch with both parents can keep them connected on everyday activities and ideas.

Cooperate. Kids may want both parents to come to special events, like games, plays, or recitals. It helps if parents can figure out a way to make this work.

Talk about the future. Many teens whose parents divorce worry that their own plans for the future could be affected. Talking about the future can help.

Don't make your child or therapist the messenger. Too many parents attempt to communicate through their children and thus cause undue emotional stress. Likewise, a therapist is not there to be a messenger, and using them to communicate can cause misunderstandings.

Repair the damage you've already done. Children tend to respond differently to divorce than adolescents. For young children, divorce tends to increase parental dependence. For the adolescent who is more concerned with their community of friends, divorce tends to energize more independence from family.

Get support. Talking about your feelings and reactions to the divorce with someone you trust helps. If someone is feeling depressed or stressed out, or if it's hard to concentrate on normal activities, let a counselor or therapist help.

The future can be bright. Adults who work collaboratively through a divorce can help their kids adjust and have a healthy future.

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