



Minimize the Effects of Divorce on Children

Divorce is a painful, difficult, life-changing experience for everyone involved. Children have their lives disrupted and have little control over the changes. Additionally, they are often put in the middle of their two parents, who are angry and reactive. Parents divorcing are aware that their children are affected, but often do things that hurt their children unnecessarily. While you may not be able to stop the divorce and prevent your children from being affected, here are some things you can do that will help them.

- Reinforce the fact that the divorce isn't their fault. Children often feel responsible for their parents' divorce, even when no one has blamed them.
- Don't put them in the middle of you and your ex-spouse. Don't use them as a spy or messenger. Don't talk to them about your grievances against your ex-spouse or try to get them to side with you.
- Reaffirm their need to have a relationship with your ex-spouse. Try not to be threatened by it. Recognize that it is in your children's best interest to have some kind of relationship with both parents, unless it is a dangerous situation.
- Validate their feelings and thoughts. This is sometimes difficult because some of their negative feelings and thoughts may be directed at you. Allow them to tell you how they are feeling in a respectful way, without getting angry or defensive.
- Let them grieve in their own way. Allow the process of grief: shock and denial, anger, blaming, and sadness. They are necessary before your child can reach the stage of acceptance. Children will need time to work through all the feelings and adjustments.
- Get them support: counseling, divorce recovery for children, and/or positive mentors/family/friends are all very helpful. You can make your child go to counseling just like you make them go to the doctor when they don't want to. You are still the parent who is responsible for directing and parenting your child and for doing what is in your child's best interest.
- Get support for yourself to know how to handle their reactions and issues. There are so many problems to deal with in divorce that you may not prioritize your children's needs. Make sure you attend to the problems they have, and get help with how to deal with them when necessary.
- Try to maintain as much normalcy in your home life and social life for your children as possible. There are many changes and disruptions in divorce that you cannot control, so try to control the ones you can.

- Try to co-parent with your ex-spouse as much as possible so that the children have consistent rules and cannot use you and your ex-spouse manipulatively to get their way. Make it your goal to be able to attend events involving your children even though your ex-spouse is there, and conduct yourself in a way that does not ruin it for your children.

If you do these things, you will minimize the negative effects of the divorce on your children and make their lives easier. As difficult as some of these things are to do, they will reap positive benefits.