



Children Coping with Divorce

By Teri Claassen MSW, LCSW, LCAC

8 Tips for Helping Children Cope with Divorce

Divorce can be a devastating experience for all involved. Many people, especially kids, feel as if the world they used to know has now died. It is important for parents to understand ways to minimize the effects of divorce on their kids. Here are 8 key things to keep in mind.

Make sure you talk about feelings- It is very important for you to offer a forum for your kids to be real and honest with you about how they feel with all the changes going on around them. Make sure you give them permission to be sad, angry, hurt, or betrayed. Don't get defensive if they are upset with you. Validate their emotions with phrases like: "I know this is hard for you. Is there anything you need from me?"

Keep the adult information and decisions for adults only- It is a slippery slope to talk with your children about all the details of the divorce. Sharing too much with them can cause internal havoc in a child. This includes not fighting with your ex around your child. Remember that they have to carry whatever information they have seen or heard. More information than necessary can cause them to feel like they are "growing up too fast" or that they are losing a piece of their childhood. Allow your kids to be kids and don't burden them with all your issues. They should not be your support system.

Be aware of feelings of divided loyalty- Often times kids will feel torn between parents. They may struggle if they had a great time at dad's house for the weekend, but may not want to tell mom about it because they don't want her to feel hurt or left out. Even if it is hard for you to hear these types of things, it is important for you to encourage your child to be open about the good and bad of what goes on at the other parent's

home. Your reaction to this is vital. If you make a face, sigh, or criticize, it will only tell your child to keep secrets from you and could create an emotionally unsafe environment.

Keep your negative comments to yourself- You divorced your spouse for a reason, but it is not necessary for you to share all those reasons with your child. That is their parent and they are literally 50% of your child. That parent is part of who they are. Hating your ex could equal in a child's mind that you hate your child, too.

Give your child some element of control- Kids feel totally out of control of their world while going through a divorce. Try to find ways to let them make small decisions so they don't feel completely powerless. Some great examples include letting them choose what color to paint their room in the new house, what to have for dinner, what recreational activity to do, etc.

Reassure your child- Don't assume that your child "knows" you love them. They might not trust what they know anymore because it is totally changing. Tell your child several times a day that you love them and will be there for them. Stay involved in their life. Don't avoid your child's activities for fear of seeing your ex. Your child will be the one that suffers if you do.

Take care of yourself- It is a gift to your child to work on yourself and issues you struggle with going through the divorce. Being the best person that you can be will benefit you and your child.

If you see any concerns with your child's reaction to the divorce, seek professional help- Counseling can be one of the greatest ways to give your child an uninvolved, safe sounding board as they are dealing with the divorce.

Contact Renewed Horizon today if you need additional support, more resources, or to schedule an appointment.

About Renewed Horizon

Renewed Horizon is a Christian counseling practice that serves individuals, couples, families, and teens to address difficulties in life. It is a place to find guidance, healing, and hope when life feels hopeless and unimaginable.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” ~ II Corinthians 5:17



Teri Claassen received her Bachelor’s Degree from Anderson University with a double major in Psychology and Family Science. She completed her graduate studies at Indiana University where she received her Masters in Social Work.

Teri is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in Florida and Indiana and a Licensed Clinical Addictions Counselor in Indiana.

Teri was a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) and a member of The National Council on Family Relations for 8 years. She is currently a member of The National Association of Social Workers.



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