

Navigating Divorce

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Deciding that you and your partner are heading for the dreaded “D” word is something every parent fears. Not only are you faced with separating from a marriage, but there are many big decisions that need to be made when emotions are already high, and anxiety increases tenfold when children are involved. As a psychologist, I often am asked, “How do I tell my kids we are getting a divorce?” Below are a few tips that can help you navigate through this difficult time.

- **Make sure that you are sure about the separation before talking to the kids.**
 - Children are most likely already aware that there is tension in the home. Bouncing back and forth before a decision has been made can be even more difficult for a child to understand.
 - However, don’t drag it out either. If you know it is happening for sure, make a plan to tell them.
- **Plan what you will say and when.**
 - Whenever possible, parents should talk to the kids together. This allows children to see that even though change is happening, the parents are still working together and present in their lives.
 - Pick a time when everyone is calm and when everyone has time to talk without interruption.
- **Be honest, but choose your words carefully.**
 - Children are extremely perceptive. I promise they have picked up on the tension, arguing, and fighting in the house. Tell them what is happening in simple, clear language, but avoid too much detail or blame. Your kids don’t need to know the dirty details, just what is happening and why.
 - Here are a few examples. Remember the language will change based on the age/developmental level of the child.
 - “Your dad and I have been fighting for awhile now and have decided we are not going to live together anymore. We are still your parents, and we love you.”
 - “Your mother and I have decided we can no longer stop fighting, so it is best if we get a divorce. We are ready to answer any questions you might have because we know this is hard to hear.”
 - “Mommy is going to move into grandma’s house. You will stay with her during the week and me on the weekends. We will make sure you have your own special space in both houses.”
- **Be prepared for big emotions and lots of questions.**
 - BE PATIENT. Seriously, you can’t rush this. It’s okay for children to have questions and need a lot of reassurance. All feelings are valid and require validation and support.
 - Make sure you don’t choose a time to talk when anyone is on a time crunch.
- **Assure them that this change is for the best.**
 - You are not lying to them. There is a lot of research out there about divorce producing better outcomes for children than parents trying to “stick it out for the kids.”
- **Be present during/after the divorce. Show them you can put your money where your mouth is so to speak.**
 - Show up when you say you will. Take them to games, clubs, sporting events. Cook together. Watch TV together. Provide physical and emotional affection. Show your children that you meant it when you said you will love them always and will never stop being their parent.





- **Be patient with yourself.**

- You are going to mess up sometimes. You might not have the “right” answer to every question. That’s okay. You really can’t go wrong if you show compassion and patience, provide reassurance, choose your words with intent, and back up your words with actions.

If you need help navigating divorce for your family, please call us at 734-416-9098. We are here to help!