

PARENT Talk

Kids and Divorce

When a husband and wife decide to end their marriage, it's a difficult time for adults and for children. People get divorced for many reasons. Often it is because they have grown apart, they can no longer communicate with one another or because they have conflicts.

Parents and children often have differing perceptions about divorce. Parents perceive divorce as the best way to end the problems of a troubled marriage. Kids usually see divorce as the end of their family.

Children's emotions vary

Whether you are divorced or are contemplating a divorce, you should be aware of the effects on your children. Kids usually feel many different emotions, such as anger at their parents, sad that their family is ending, guilt because they think they are the reason for the divorce (which is rarely true), fear of what the future will bring, worry about how their friends will react toward them, loneliness because they may think they have lost a parent, confusion about the changes the divorce will bring. And sometimes kids feel relieved if there was a lot of yelling or abuse in the marriage. All of these feelings are normal and acceptable. Parents often feel some of the same emotions.

Divorce means changes in your child's environment. Custody may mean your child will live with one or the other of you or split time between the two of you. Divorce also means new responsibilities for your child. After the divorce, you may decide to see new people. This, too, is a change for your child and may be confusing.

To help your child cope with divorce ...

Here are some things you should remember in the event of a divorce to help you and your child better cope with the reality and feelings of divorce:

- **Discuss the divorce with your child.** Listen to your child's feelings – pay attention to his or her body language and facial expressions. Encourage your child to ask

questions if worried or confused, and to develop a positive attitude.

- **Assure your child the divorce will change the family, not end it.** Tell and show your child that you love him or her. Keep most rules and routines the same.
- **Encourage your child to adjust to the new situation.** Be gentle but firm. Let your child know that the family won't return to its previous form.
- **Plan fun activities with your child to help get rid of anger and to focus on positive feelings.** This will encourage him or her to accept the new situation.
- **Do not use your child as a spy or messenger between you and your former spouse.** If you have something to say to your former spouse, do it yourself. Your child is experiencing enough pressure – don't add more.
- **Follow your child's behavior at school.** Be aware of any signs of daydreaming, boredom, anger, forgetfulness or general changes in behavior.

Although you, too, are experiencing a new situation with new stresses, try to pay extra attention to your child. That could make all the difference for him or her.

If you need help

If you need more advice, call Crisis Services at (810) 257-3740, where a counselor is always available. TTY users call (810) 232-6320. ©