

Respecting Children's Boundaries

THESE VALUABLE POINTS WILL HELP YOU HELP THEM
AS THEY GO THROUGH ONE OF THE TOUGHEST TIMES OF THEIR LIVES:
YOUR DIVORCE

Let Your Child Love The Other Parent: Your kids won't feel the way you do about the other parent, and since it's their right to love both of you, avoid expressing negative feelings about the other parent to them. Likewise; sharing parent conflicts and expecting kids to side with you against the other parent places a terrible emotional burden on them! So, avoid burdening them with adult problems or withholding them from a fit parent, even if the other parent isn't paying child support, or upsets you in other ways.

Minimize Changes Caused By Divorce: Keep kids' relationships with friends and significant adults stable and consistent. Relationships with daycare providers, teachers, relatives from both sides, and friends are some of their most stabilizing influences. So, try and keep them in their familiar relationships, schools and neighborhood. Likewise, in spite of reassurance that losses caused by divorce are not their fault, your kids may adapt to change by believing that they deserve loss. Especially, if you or others respond to their pain with diminishment statements such as: "Look on the bright side"... "You'll get over it"... "Imagine how I feel", etc.

Help Your Child Understand Responsibility: Discovering that things change as a result of what I do is an essential source of self-esteem. Small children love showing parents how lights go on and off when they flick the switch! The downside of this aspect of growth is that children assume responsibility when unwanted changes happen as well. Consequently, kids often blame themselves when parents divorce. Talk with your kids about how things happen as a result of power that others have. Telling kids "It's not your fault" conflicts with their emerging sense of power and has minimal effect. Here is an important line that helps kids differentiate between their power and yours: "Kids can't make parents divorce". Repeat it often.

Be Comforting and Emotionally Available: How well kids accept change and loss depends on how available you are to comfort them. There's a saying: "As we go, so go our kids". If you're stuck in fear or anger because of divorce, if you deaden your feelings with drugs, alcohol, compulsive behaviors etc., your kids can't connect with you. And if they can't feel the comfort they need, soon they will learn to avoid feelings with emotionally deadening behaviors as well.

Help Your Child Feel Good About Life: Children forgive easily and don't hold grudges. They're too busy looking ahead to be held back. Hold tight to your hope as well. Minimize comments rooted in despair, depression, anger, doubt, and mistrust. Likewise, your kids aren't your "Best Friends". Having to comfort or care for a parent will make a child resentful.

Maintain A Set Of Rules: Kids discover personal power through their relationship with you! "Look at how the light goes on and off when I flick this switch!" isn't a lot different from "Look at how I get my way when I manipulate you!". As their home changes, expect them to push the rules. Don't let divorce prompted guilt relax boundaries. Stay consistent! While it's normal for kids to want to get their way, the reward comes at a price: their self-esteem. A child's common sense tells them that bad behavior may get them what they want, but the reward is tainted by being bad. You want selfish, insensitive kids with poor self-esteem? Let them get away with stuff.

Protect Your Child's Right To Adjust: How long before your kids are ready to see you with someone new, without feeling like they're losing you or betraying the other parent? Factors include your child's maturity, how well the other parent is doing emotionally, how easily the new person interacts with your kids, and if they also have kids. Suggestion: Introduce someone new as a friend and avoid intimate displays of affection for at least three months! Also, your kids will learn to adjust to change and loss as well as you do. Seek insight for what you might have done differently through counseling and divorce recovery workshops, and speak of your divorce with humility. You are the model that helps your kids learn to develop healthy humility for their missteps in life.

Protect Your Child's Right To Childhood: Be careful not to make one of your kids a "little adult" by giving them responsibilities they may not be ready for. A child who has to become responsible for caring for brothers and sisters often feels the reward of authority, but at a cost of important childhood qualities, such as: spontaneity, playfulness, and creativity. If you assign a parental role to one of your kids, be sure to affirm his or her right to still be a child. Make sure your child is given ample time to play. Make sure that, when you are home, your child is relieved of the pseudo-parental role.