

■ Strategies to Protect Your Children and Teens During Your Divorce or Separation

DIVORCE OR SEPARATION is difficult on all family members. While you and your former partner may disagree about many things, you both agree that you want your children to get through your separation as well as possible. To create the best possible situation, it would be ideal if both of you could agree on the following points and communicate them to your children together. If that does not feel possible, try to each talk to your children separately while committing to these guidelines to protect their emotional well-being.

■ TELL YOUR CHILDREN AND TEENS

- ▶ The adults in the family are having problems and are planning to separate or divorce. These problems are between the adults and not the fault of the teens or their siblings.
- ▶ You love them deeply and they are your greatest blessing in the world. You are now and will always be their parent.
- ▶ You will try as hard as possible to not disrupt their lives.
- ▶ You will work hard to manage your fighting, even if that means getting professional help. You can say, “We do not want our conflicts to hurt you.”
- ▶ You will not bring your children and teens into the adult conflict; therefore, you will not speak negatively about the other parent.
- ▶ You want your children and teens to be connected to both of their parents. If this is not possible right now, both parents will support an honest and trusting relationship with one parent.
- ▶ Both parents will try to continue to support them at routine and special events such as sports competitions, concerts, proms, and graduations.
- ▶ You will be working out a plan in advance for the holidays that gives time to be with each parent and his or her respective extended families. You will allow your children and teens to be prepared by knowing where they are going far in advance. You will be open to creating new traditions.
- ▶ There are times that you feel so hurt or overwhelmed by the divorce that they may see you crying or upset, but it is not their job to step in and try to fix your feelings. You will be spending time with friends and other adults or even professionals who will provide support during this difficult time.
- ▶ While you may be preoccupied with your own problems, being a parent is still the most important thing to you. They should never try to spare you by withholding what they are feeling or handling things on their own when they could really use your guidance.
- ▶ You are aware that they may (even inadvertently) try to take advantage of the change in parental communication. You both will be trying to work closely as parents to ensure this doesn't happen. You will try to keep the rules in both houses similar.
- ▶ You will not be the perfect parent, but you can still be a strong parent and will always try to do what is right.
- ▶ You are committed (with all your heart) to being loving, caring, and supportive. You will always be open to listening to their needs so you can be most helpful. This means they will have to remain open to sharing those needs.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your health care professional. There may be variations in treatment that your health care professional may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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