

Lesson # 14: Tips on helping your Children Through Separation and Divorce

Divorced Fathers Network
Advocates Of Shared Parenting
'Because Children Love Both Their Parents'

Tips On Helping Your Children Through Separation and Divorce*

1. Take your child's "**TLC**" into consideration:

T = Temperament and resilience. Words used to describe this aspect include active, quiet, shy, easygoing, determined, sensitive, resilient, and high strung.

L = Level of development and prior experience. Development can be delayed, average or advanced. This applies to children in many ways: physically, emotionally and intellectually. Your children's previous experience with drastic change can help you determine the best course.

C = Constitution and physical sturdiness. Are you children delicate or sturdy? Susceptible to illness or rarely sick? Paying attention to these factors can help guide you in determining the best routine and schedule for your children. It pays to be especially observant with sensitive children. For instance, frequent back-and-forth overnights or long periods with no contact with on& parent are usually difficult for sensitive children.

2. Explain change to your children. Offer them simple, concrete answers, without a tone of anger, sadness, or frightened uncertainty. One conversation explaining changes will not be sufficient.
3. Talk to your children. Clarify what's happening and take full responsibility for it. Children often imagine things to be worse than they are. Security is built on trust, and trust requires understanding. If possible, offer a short, true explanation phrased in a positive way. Ex: Mom and I have tried for a long time to work things out, but we are not able to live together anymore. Stay away from giving too much information, which can be as harmful as too little. It is much easier for children to deal with the truth than to cope with abrupt changes, surprises, whispered hostility or double messages (words saying something different than tone). Demystifying these events is important.
4. Give older children a say by asking them what they want and how their plan would work. Then consider this in your decision making. There is an important exception however. A parent should never ask any child which parent he/she wants to live with, or whether or not there should be a separation or divorce.
5. Children should have a strong voice, but not be asked to make final decisions. This would be asking for adult-like support and reassurance from the children,

which is not appropriate. Making a child responsible for major decisions can be very damaging. Even if the child's opinion is reflected in the parents' decision, making that decision is still the parents' responsibility. This allows the children a voice, while keeping them free from the responsibility, guilt, and loyalty conflicts. When asking the children's opinion, make sure they're telling both parents the same thing, as children will sometimes tell a parent what they think he/she wants to hear.

*from "Mom's House, Dad's House" by Isolina Ricci 1980,1997

Contact DFN by: phone: 831-335-5855

www.DivorcedFathers.org

Email:steve@divorcedfathers.org