

Lesson # 21: Changing Our Vocabulary

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

Changing Our Vocabulary

Tonight's topic has to do with changing our attitudes and perceptions about custody and visitation by starting with changes in the vocabulary we use in everyday conversation. It was inspired by a bit of discussion we had last week about making the change from using "ex-wife" to "children's mother." I didn't really understand it at the time, but I did some reading and have a better idea now.

Changing the way you refer to the children's mother has to do with acknowledging the changing role she plays in your life. She is no longer your partner, and you now have to transition into a business-like relationship. The term "children's mother" allows the emotional distance necessary to start accomplishing that task. Using this term until you have become "emotionally divorced" can help you focus on the current relationship between the two of you, which is parent to parent.

In "Mom's House, Dad's House," Isolina Ricci defines two types of vocabulary as "stinkweed" words and "rose" words. Which terms you choose to employ in discussing or describing divorce and custody issues can affect progress towards co-parenting, as well as your children's perceptions of divorce.

The following are some examples:

- a). Instead of saying "visit," try saying "live with/be with"
- b). Instead of saying "I have children, but they live with their mother/father," try saying "I have a family"
- c). Instead of saying "the children's mother/father left us," try saying "I have a family"
- d). Instead of saying "the children are seeing or visiting their mom/dad," try saying "the children are with their mother/father at their other house/with their other family"
- e). Instead of saying "fatherless, motherless, split or broken home, incomplete home," try saying "the home, the family"
- f). Instead of saying "the children have one home and their father/mother visits," try saying "the children have two homes, and expanded family"

g). Instead of saying "the marriage broke up, failed," try saying "the marriage ended"

h). Instead of saying "wife, ex-wife, husband, ex-husband," try saying "the children's mother/father"

You may find these terms uncomfortable at first, but don't let discomfort prevent you from trying them out and seeing what happens, though it may take some time. You might see changes in your own feelings and attitudes, as well as those around you, including your children.

Isolina Ricci offers a good bit of advice when she says that "if a word or phrase describes the life you want to live, keep it. If it doesn't, toss it out and find a better one."

You may encounter surprise or resistance from others when using these new terms. The person you're speaking with might express disagreement. These instances can be used to start creating change in those around you. Rather than being embarrassed, apologetic, or regretful, try saying something like, "I'm sorry you feel that way. I see things differently." Changing societal attitudes about divorce and parenting starts with one word at a time.

Contact DFN by: phone: 831-335-5855

www.DivorcedFathers.org

Email: steve@divorcedfathers.org