

Supporting Your Child Through Separation and Divorce

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Separation and divorce can be one of the most difficult experiences a family faces. Alongside your own feelings of sadness, anger, or fear, you are trying to support your child through a time of significant change and loss. Please know that it's normal for this process to feel overwhelming at times. You are doing your best—and your efforts truly matter. Here are some ways you can help your child through this challenging time:

Communicate with Honesty and Reassurance

Give your child a simple but honest explanation about the separation, helping them understand that it was not their fault. If possible, no matter how painful, try to tell them when the whole family is together (including both parents and all children). *Remember: It's okay if the conversation isn't perfect. What matters most is your love and presence.*

Be Emotionally Available

Be available to listen. Accept your child's feelings—whether sadness, anger, guilt, or confusion—and remind them that all feelings are normal. Use words that invite them to share more, such as, "Tell me more about that," or "What are you feeling right now?"

Encourage openness by saying: "You can tell me anything, and I won't be mad at you no matter what." *Your patience and understanding will offer them a safe place to heal.*

Reassure Them Frequently

Children often blame themselves for the separation. Reassure them often, in both words and actions, that the divorce is not their fault.

Provide Stability

Set up a regular visitation schedule. Children feel most secure when they know when and for how long visits will occur. Put a calendar in their room showing when they are with each parent (use color codes for children who cannot read, e.g., red = Mom, blue = Dad).

Consistency helps children feel safe amidst change.

Protect Your Child from Conflict

- Avoid arguing or fighting with the other parent in your child's presence. *(If this is difficult, seeking professional help can make a real difference for you and your child.)*
- Don't criticize the other parent in front of your child. When you criticize the other parent, you inadvertently harm your child's emotional security.
- Don't use your child as a messenger or make them take sides. Children naturally want to please both parents. Don't put them in a position where they feel forced to choose.
- When you talk about the other parent, be as neutral and supportive as possible. *Remember: Your child deserves the freedom to love both parents without fear or guilt.*

Focus on What You Can Control

Take responsibility for your own behavior. You cannot change or control the other parent's behavior, but you can change and control yourself. Modeling healthy coping will teach your child resilience.

Care for Yourself

Taking care of yourself is not selfish—it's essential. The better you care for yourself, the better you can care for your child. Reach out for support through relatives, friends, support groups, or professionals.

You are not alone. Help is available.

For more information or support, contact Liana Lowenstein:

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