



Divorce

Tips to Help You and Your Children Cope

Grief, anger and disappointment can color every aspect of your life during a divorce. But divorce is also a time of rebuilding for you and your children. Here are some ideas to help you cope with this challenging time:

Let yourself grieve.

Expect to experience a period of mourning during a divorce. Regardless of your feelings of anger toward your former spouse, you must take time to grieve the loss of a mate and the parent of your children. It may seem impossible at first, but you'll emerge from a period of healthy mourning with a new center of emotional balance as a single person.

Cooperate on parenting.

As painful as it may be to maintain contact with your former spouse, it's essential to create mutually acceptable coparenting agreements. Work out the specifics of custody and visitation before the divorce. Mediation services and mental health professionals can be more helpful than lawyers in this regard. Custodial parents need to share their children and let the other parent play a real role in raising them. Noncustodial parents must resist the temptation to manipulate their children's loyalties. Let your children know that the other parent has strengths and limitations, just like you.

Communicate with your children.

Children often believe that they're to blame for a divorce. Whether they express this worry, tell them they're not responsible for the separation. They may have to hear this message a number of times before their guilt subsides.

When a parent leaves, young children may feel abandoned and unloved. Tell your children that you and your spouse still love them and will continue to do so. Phone calls and a photograph of the absent parent may help your children to remember and feel close.

Encourage your children to talk about or act out

their feelings. Look for children's books about divorce. Ask questions about the story, such as: "How do you think this boy feels?" or "Do her mom and dad still love her?" Recognize that divorce may be very unsettling to grown children, too.

Take time to adjust.

You may be facing some very practical changes in your life, such as moving, finding a new job and making new child care arrangements. Go easy on yourself and your kids while you make these transitions. Don't rush into any decisions, particularly those with long-term consequences. Most importantly, don't try to solve your practical or emotional problems by jumping into a new marriage.

Build support networks.

It's common after a divorce for mutual friends to take sides with one partner. This is a perfect time to make new friends. Seek out others who enjoy living and growing in the present. You and your children also may benefit from professional counseling at this time.

Nurture yourself and your children.

When you're in the midst of emotional trauma, it's easy for everything to seem out of balance. Start a regular exercise routine if you don't have one. Enjoy quiet times as well as active play with your children. Also schedule leisure time just for you—to relax and enjoy some solitude.

Most of all, try to remember that healing takes time. When you begin to accept the challenge of new beginnings, you'll come to a deeper understanding of yourself and be able to build a better future for your children.