

Children First

The breakdown of any family relationship is a life changing event for everybody involved, with adults and children processing separation and divorce differently. Here are some top tips for assisting children in processing a divorce:-

Communication. It can be tempting to shield children from the practicalities of a divorce. Whilst we do not recommend that children are told every detail of the divorce, it is important to explain to them in a simple and age appropriate language what the divorce means for them. Children will need to know what is happening and the basics of the separation, such as who they will live with and when they will spend time with the other parent. Some children may feel they are to blame for the separation and reassurance should be provided that this is not the case. It is imperative that children are not drawn into arguments about who is to blame for the breakdown of the marriage.

Do not badmouth. When the other parent says bad things about you, resist the temptation to respond in kind. The children will resent this over time and it is the badmouthing parent who is damaging their own relationship with the children, not yours.

Present a united front. This will reassure children that you and your partner are able to work together to parent them whilst they are adjusting to the separation and, in the future. This will reaffirm to your children that you are committed to co-parenting and to ensuring they continue to benefit from having a meaningful relationship with both of you. You may want to consider attending a parenting course designed specifically for separating parents.

Allow children to express their emotions. Every child's reaction to a divorce will be different and it is necessary for them to explore their emotions. This will allow them to better communicate how they are feeling and you will be better able to deal with their emotions, putting in suitable coping strategies and boundaries where necessary.

Do not be afraid to ask for professional help if you need it. Divorce is overwhelming for not only children but for parents who are trying to navigate their way in a separation. Seek professional help if you are struggling to come to terms with the breakdown of the marriage or, you are concerned about the impact of the divorce on the future and your children.

Parental conflict. Children should not be exposed to parental conflict that may follow as a result of the divorce. It is in the children's best interests to have a relationship with both parents and they should not be exposed to any arguments. It is fine for your children to be aware that people do not always agree but model solution finding discussions with compromises rather than destructive behaviour. Entering into an agreement, within a Parenting Plan or Child Arrangements Order, that sets out the living and contact arrangements for children and records that you will work together to ensure the children are free from conflict can be a powerful way of reaffirming your commitment to your children during a divorce.

Divorce is painful. No matter how much you love your children, you won't be able to take all the hurt away. Whilst you can't make it wholly better, you have the power to make it much worse. Remember the two of you will always be the only parents your children will ever have.