

AFTER THE DIVORCE: Ways to Provide Your Child With Love and Support

Once the immediate effects of the divorce have occurred, and life has begun to settle into a routine of sorts, your children will continue to need extra time, love, and support. Be prepared for children to show some reactions to the divorce for a year or more after. Some ways to support your child following a divorce follow.

- Be alert to signs of distress. Watch for behaviors such as nightmares, crying, clinging to one parent or both, efforts to get parents together, changes in school behaviors, or feelings of guilt. Encourage your child to talk about how he/she feels and what concerns he/she has.
- Be consistent. Children will need a structure and routine to their day now more than ever to feel safe and supported. Along with this comes settling into a stable environmental situation as soon as possible. If moving was involved, try to make sure your child gets to choose some things about the new house or his/her room. Try to have as many familiar objects around as possible to help ease the transition.
- Continue to avoid talking negatively about the other parent in front of the child or to those who might repeat what you said to the child. Also avoid sending messages to your ex-spouse through your child or asking your child to “spy” on the other parent. This may just place the child in the middle, which can be painful.
- Continue to reinforce to your child that he/she is not to blame. Children may need reassurance for a couple of years that they did not cause the divorce and could do nothing to stop it.
- Avoid using your child as a sounding board or confidant. It’s easy to turn to them to talk about worries, concerns, or anger regarding divorce. However, it’s important that you remain in the parent role and avoid talking to your child as if he/she were more like an adult.
- Don’t discourage your child to continue to have a relationship with the other parent. Also don’t make your child feel guilty about having fun with the other parent. It’s important for the child to feel like he/she can be open about his/her relationships with **both** parents.
- Both parents should continue to be involved in their child’s life whenever possible. Though you may feel stressed and overwhelmed with the divorce process, your child will continue to need you to help him/her with homework, attend school functions, play games, etc. with him/her.
- Expect that your child will want his parents to get back together. Let him know that it’s normal to have these wishes but that it’s very unlikely that parents ever get back together.