



## Dealing with Divorce: What Parents Need to Know



by Hannah Boyd

The one good thing about getting a divorce? The company. If you've decided that ending your marriage is the right thing for your family, you're not alone: about 50% of marriages end in divorce. But no matter how common it is, divorce raises a lot of tough questions for parents. How do you break the news? What's the best custody arrangement? And what happens when you're ready to start dating again?

There's no easy way to tell your kids you're getting a divorce. What may have been an unhappy marriage for you may have seemed like a happy family to them. More likely, they sensed discord but hoped things would improve. Ironically, breaking the news gently will require teamwork between you and your spouse.

"It's best for both parents to tell the kids together," says Brette Sember, JD, author of *Parent With Your Ex and Divorce Without War*. "Kids want to know the details of how the divorce will affect them personally – where will I sleep, will I have my own room, etc, so be sure to address those questions. Do not place blame for the divorce on one parent or another. Do not lie and tell them nothing will change, because they know it will. Instead, try to reassure them that you both love them, will always be there for him, and will continue to be parents together."

Of course, co-parenting during divorce isn't easy, especially when custody issues are at stake. Every child's needs are different, and when it comes to custody, the only rule of thumb is to put those needs first. "Children should have access to both parents, but stability (meaning having a set routine) is just as important," says Laura Giles, MSW, who facilitates a parent education program for the Supreme Court of Virginia. Having consistent rules and routines at both homes can be very comforting.

"Your child loves the other parent and saying hurtful things will hurt your child," says Sember. Bite your tongue if

you have to, but refrain from disparaging your spouse and make it clear you support their relationship. Taking care of yourself will help. “You need an adult support system and time off from your kids to enjoy that support,” says Elinor Robin, PhD, LMHC, LMFT, founder of A Friendly Divorce, a mediation service in Boca Raton, Florida.

When it comes to dating, you may feel ready long before your kids do. Remember that they may still hope for reconciliation, and give them time to adjust to the divorce. Let them know you’re dating around before introducing a “significant” other, and keep your expectations realistic; while it’s reasonable to expect respect, love will probably take a while.

Divorce is a process, but there’s more good news: Giles says concerned parents can make the adjustment period easier on their kids. “If parents give themselves and the children a year to heal, allow the children to have a positive relationship with the other parent, have a stable routine, and have easy access to both parents, the prognosis is very good.”

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