

All about the kids

ALL THINGS
SEPARATION
& DIVORCE





If you bungle raising your children, I don't think whatever else you do matters very much.

Jackie Kennedy

It is not the Divorce of parents that causes harm to children, it is the conflict that follows.

A separation or divorce can be a highly stressful and emotional experience for all involved. For children, it can be traumatic to witness the dissolution of your parents' marriage and the breakup of the family.

You can dramatically reduce your children's trauma by making their well-being and welfare your top priority. If you shield your children from adult disagreements and support them as they move between your households, it is unlikely that your divorce will have any lasting impact on their adult lives.

Childhood is a short season and it's our responsibility as parents not to *bungle* it.



TOP 10 Parenting Dos and Don'ts

1 Reassure your children that you (both) still love them and that it's *not their fault*. Help them to discuss their feelings, often, and listen sympathetically to your children's feelings and opinions without judgment. Seek professional help if you need to – anything to get through. ANYTHING. Strive to provide these 3 things daily: love, stability and security. Their well-being needs to be your focus.

2 Never involve children in adult issues. This doesn't even need elaboration – but I will embellish a little anyway...Divorce is between two adults. It has absolutely NOTHING to do with kids. Nothing. So don't involve kids in adult issues. Hard yes, but you're up to it. Lean on other adults for emotional support rather than your children.

3 Never bad-mouth your former partner. Your children only get one mum and dad and he or she is IT. They should never feel guilty about loving their mum or dad, it is their right to do so – in whatever flawed and imperfect shape or form that mum or dad comes. No matter how much you want to demean your former spouse, or how much you feel entitled to do so, resist the urge - **don't do it.** Your kids are half mum, half dad – and they know it. Demean their mum/dad and you demean them too.

4 Foster a loving and meaningful relationship between your children and their mum or dad. Include grandparents and other relatives as well. There is no end of worldwide research that tells us that if children are supported and encouraged to maintain a positive relationship with both parents and significant others, they are more likely to adapt to the changes that separation and divorce bring. They need all the love and support and care they can get – it takes a village, remember?

5 Don't expect children to make adult decisions. Especially decisions about spending time with mum or dad; about who attends birthday parties, sporting events, school events etc. Discuss these issues with the other parent – they are the only other person in the world (besides you, of course) who wants the best for your kids.

6 Never communicate through your children. Using your children to deliver messages, no matter how unimportant, will make them a party to the dispute between you and your partner. Remember: children should always be sheltered from any arguments and disputes between you and your former partner.



7 Do not interrogate your children regarding their time spent with your former spouse. Allow them to share their experiences with you – without judgment or commentary. If you are unhappy about any experiences, discuss your concerns with your former partner. Not with your kids.

8 Promote security and stability by establishing a consistent routine. If children living between two households have the benefit of consistency between their homes, they have the best chance of feeling a sense of security, enabling them to enjoy all benefits of being a child. Dad will have his way of doing things and mum will too. But for the most part, keep things like values and expectations the same (or similar).

9 Be flexible. Don't be afraid to be flexible and show understanding if your former partner asks for variations to your parenting arrangements. You will no doubt need the same in return one day, and when you do, make sure you give plenty of notice.

10 There is no right and wrong. There is only *best effort*. This is your divorce, and these are your children. Follow your own instincts often, listen to others less. Do YOUR best to get through. Love yourself and love your kids. And lean on others.



It will
get
better.

It has to.



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