



/guide

Your questions answered

HOW TO SUPPORT CHILDREN THROUGH DIVORCE

The purpose of this Stowe guide is to share tips for supporting children through their parents' divorce, and beyond.

Divorce is undoubtedly a challenging time for children, and every child will react differently.

As parents, it is important to continue to put your children first, prioritising their wellbeing as you and your family transition. But how can you support your child through divorce?

Depending on your children's age they may have a varying degree of understanding about what's happening, and differing needs from their parents. But there are practical steps you can take to help your child adjust.

Be open

Children are perceptive and know when there's something up. Hiding the reality, or delaying telling your child that you're separating, may cause unnecessary anxiety. Be open with your child and explain things clearly, in an age-appropriate way.

Try to find the right balance of keeping them informed; what do they need to know, and what is best left unsaid? For example, they don't need to hear the details of why your relationship has broken down but may benefit from knowing what happens next and how things will be different in the future.

Maintain their close relationships

Ensure that children maintain contact with both parents and have quality time with each parent regularly. Also keep up relationships with grandparents, and other close family and friends who they usually spend time with.

Validation and active listening

Dedicate time to actively listen to their concerns and provide reassurance. Remember they don't have a blueprint for how to handle this and it will take time for them to absorb what's happening.

Validate and acknowledge their feelings as they come to terms with things. Depending on their age, they may need help to identify their emotions.

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Let your children know that it is okay to express their emotions and assure them they can share their feelings without hurting yours.

It can be very difficult seeing your child upset but be careful to avoid trying to immediately 'fix' their emotions with unrealistic promises.

Respect their emotions

When children first learn of their parents' divorce, it is normal for them to experience a period of adjustment, and feelings akin to grief. It is essential to respect all of their emotions, which could include sadness, hostility, pining or guilt.

Let them know that they can talk to you or their other parent about their feelings at any time and encourage them to ask questions.

Remind them that no matter what they say or how they feel, you both love them still.

Maintaining routines

Maintaining routines is an effective way of providing a sense of security and combatting anxiety. It's incredibly valuable for children to feel that while some things are changing, others are staying the same.

By maintaining familiar daily patterns, such as regular mealtimes, bedtime routines, and extracurricular activities, children can find some comfort in the stability of their day-to-day lives.

Minimise conflict

Conflict between parents has a detrimental effect on children. So, be civil about your ex and avoid speaking negatively about them in front of your children.

Encourage a healthy relationship between your children and their other parent, so they can continue to benefit from the love and connection of both parents.

Never urge your child to take sides or be a go-between.

Prepare them

Give your children notice when things are due to change and explain what the changes will look like. Remember that children's perception of time is different to an adult's, so bear this in mind.

See things from your child's perspective

Their concerns may not be what you expect. They have the disadvantage of less experience to draw on to manage their expectations and may not fully understand what's happening. So don't assume anything. Something that may seem obvious to you, might not be to them.

Consider informing other carers

Once you've told your children about your divorce, it's a good idea to share this with their childcare or educational settings too. Informing nursery key workers or your child's teacher means they can look out for any potential reactions or behaviours when you're not there and give you further insight into how your child is handling the changes.

Common worries and behaviours

During a divorce, children may experience a range of worries and behave in ways that are uncharacteristic. Some common issues include:

Guilt: Children often blame themselves for their parents' divorce, particularly younger kids. It is crucial to reassure them that the divorce is not their fault. Take the time to explain this to them and emphasise that the decision was made by the adults, and they are not to blame.

Anxiety: Divorce and changes to homelife can make some children anxious. Re-establishing routines, minimising conflict, and ensuring plenty of quality time together can help calm their concerns.

Behaviour Issues: Children may start acting out of sorts or testing boundaries during their parents' divorce. Creating a structured environment with clear expectations is important. Strive to maintain consistency in the rules and routines between households to help children adjust.

Regression: It is common for children to seek more parental attention and support during a major life transition. An understandable response to the uncertainty they feel. They may temporarily rely on parents for tasks they used to manage independently. Be patient and offer support, understanding that they are seeking comfort and security.

Withdrawing: Some children may become more withdrawn or detached. While it is important to give them space, make sure to create opportunities for bonding and maintain open lines of communication. Encourage them to express their feelings and be available to actively listen.

Role model resilience

It can be hard to parent whilst you're navigating the end of your relationship. You may feel as though you're being pulled in every direction leaving you feeling burnt out. But even if you are struggling, try to model resilience and calm whenever possible. This can help reinforce a sense of stability and reassurance for your children.

Ask for help

Reach out for support when you need it. Remember that you can better support your child when you feel supported. It's a good idea to build a network of people around you who you trust, such as friends, family, your divorce lawyer, a divorce coach, or a therapist if you feel it would help you.

Divorce brings a lot of long-term change for children which they need time and support to adapt to. As parents you have the chance to set the tone for the future. You and your co-parent can help your children adjust by providing a supportive and stable environment, so they can thrive during and after the divorce.

Need more information?

Call our Client Care Team on **0330 838 7456** to speak with one of our specialist family lawyers or visit **www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk**

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