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Divorce is a very difficult and confusing time for families. It is often a time of turmoil, transition and adjustment for children, which brings about a plethora of conflicting emotions. Some kiddos experience anger, sadness, worry, grief, shock, guilt and even relief. There are many things that parents can do (and not do), to help their child adjust to this difficult time in their lives. This article will focus primarily on what can be done, to help children navigate through this difficult time.

When children are told that their parents will be getting divorced, many questions run through their minds. The initial goal is to make the child feel loved, safe, secure and stable. The best way to do this is to try to normalize their lives. Even though divorce pulls at your heartstrings, and you may feel like spoiling your child, resist that urge. Children need routine and consistency during this time. If one parent can stay in the family home, that is beneficial. Children are going through a tremendous amount of change and therefore, any way to stabilize their environment is helpful. Remaining in the same school, attending the same church/synagogue, continuing play dates with friends, and engaging in activities with extended family are advantageous. The children need to feel a sense of stability and belonging. **Note to parents:** Both parents (if possible) should be together, when they tell their kiddos about the divorce. This should be done in a calm manner, with no blaming of one another. Address changes, answer questions and reassure them that both parents will be in their lives. The child needs to know that you both love them and it is in no way their fault.

Parents can help their children adapt to their new (normal) family situation in many ways. First and foremost, they need to have an open line of communication. Although parents will be going through their own process and emotions, they need to be open to listening to their kiddo's feelings and fears. Doing things like taking a walk, spending time in the park and riding bikes are all calming activities that will give the child the space to open up without feeling pressured. Validate your child's feelings, including feelings of anger giving the child a journal to write or color in, is also a good idea. There are many wonderful books about Divorce geared towards children. Reading them together in a safe place, will help the child understand that they are not alone. Setting up weekly "family meetings" to discuss fears, concerns and questions is also recommended. Although it sounds simplistic, "playing" (board games, baseball, dolls, imaginary play) with your child is also valuable. It will help them relax and maybe even laugh...laughter is a wonderful coping skill. **A note to parents:** Do not talk about adult issues with your children. They do not need to know about money, what the other parent did/did not do nor do they need to be your sounding board.

Children going through this difficult time need to learn healthy coping skills to deal with their overwhelming emotions. Exercise, eating healthy and getting enough sleep are all important aspects of their well-being. Honoring past traditions and creating new ones in each home, can also be helpful. Sometimes younger children have a hard time transitioning from one home to the other. Allowing them to take a special object (a picture, stuffed animal, blanket) with them, will soothe this process **A note to parents:** Although parents may feel like co-sleeping at this time, it is not advised. A parent who allows a child to sleep with them during this transition is passing on the idea that things are “not okay”. It also places the child in the role to take care of their parent and makes them feel that their parent is lonely. In addition, once you start co sleeping after a divorce, it is very difficult to get the child to go back into their own bed. Cuddling, reading stories at night and having a set bedtime routine are more helpful

Depending on their age and personality, children deal with divorce in many different ways. If you notice prolonged sleep issues, excessive crying, problem behaviors (and lack of attention) at home/school, withdrawal and self-harming behaviors, please seek the assistance of a qualified therapist.

Live, laugh and love,

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