



*Every aspect of a child's life can be made easier by the parents at the time of the divorce crisis. Parents should prepare their children for what lies ahead in as much concrete detail as possible. There is no way to prevent children from being distressed by their parent's divorce; there are however, important ways to help ease their fears and confusion:*

## 10 Ways to Help Your Children

1. Parents should tell their children about the divorce as soon as it has become a firm decision.

Think very carefully about how you announce the separation, for what you say or fail to say will be long remembered. Children have the right to understand why the divorce is happening; it is often the major crisis in their lives. If possible, both parents should tell all the children at the same time. Children can genuinely help each other at this time and take courage from the support of their siblings. If there are wide differences in the children's ages, the parents will want to talk later to each child separately on a level that the child can truly understand.

2. The parents should express their sadness about the breakup of the family because it will give the children the necessary permission to mourn without having to hide their feelings of loss from the adults or from themselves.
3. The parents should present the decision to divorce as a solution that the parents reached together, after they had tried every other way they could think of to solve their differences. In this way, the adults can convey the sense that they are responsible, loving parents who remain committed to their children even though they have reluctantly decided to go their separate ways.
4. Parents should explain honestly that things will change. Life will be temporarily disorganized; routines will be disrupted. One parent will be moving out of the home. The house may be sold, and the family may have to move to a new neighborhood. The mother, if not already doing so, may go back to school or take a part-time or full-time job. In short, the parents must make it clear that the divorce will bring many changes that the whole family will have to face and overcome.
5. The parents should tell children of all major developments, as the family reorganizes. Children feel powerless at

divorce and should be invited to make suggestions in matters that concern them. Adults should seriously consider these suggestions. They should be assured that they will have a say, for instance, in setting up the visiting arrangements. Once the schedule is settled, it should be explained to the children in detail. The children should not, however, be made to feel responsible for making major decisions. The goal is to involve them appropriately so that they can feel they are participating in working out a solution to the family crisis.

6. The parents should advise the children that the divorce will not weaken the bond between parent and child, even if they live apart. They need to be reassured that, though parents may divorce each other, they do not divorce their children. The children should be told realistically that everybody will have to work hard to maintain these important connections.
7. The parents must stress to the children that the divorce is not in any way the fault of the child. They must be assured that the problem existed strictly between the two adults. The children should never be allowed to assume guilt for causing the breakup.
8. The parents must state clearly that the divorce is an irrevocable decision and that the children should not and cannot waste their time and energies in the fruitless schemes and fantasies of bringing their parents back together.
9. The parents will want to make every effort to keep separate their own hurt, anger, and needs from the needs of the children. Children have a right to their own feelings and should not be asked to take sides or be forced to wander a no-man's-land in the divorce war.
10. Above all, both mother and father must give their children permission to love and maintain a relationship with the other parent. This may be the hardest task for the adults, but it can be done. With a caring, courageous effort on the part of each parent, the children, even in the midst of their turmoil, can feel supported and loved.