

# **Twelve Tips on How to Tell Your Children About Your Divorce**

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The process of separation and divorce can be very painful for you and for your whole family. Below are some tips and ideas to make talking to your children about your decision to separate or divorce somewhat easier.

## **1. Choose an appropriate time and place for your conversation.**

Choose a time and place that works for your children. The best location for most children and families is at home, where it is comfortable and private. A quiet environment is better – minimize distractions, turn off all phones [including your cell-phones], the television, and the computer.

Put your children first. Make your time during and after the meeting flexible. It is much better for your children if you are available afterwards. This allows your children the opportunity to talk with you and to be with you, if they so desire.

## **2. Expect that when you disclose that you and your spouse plan to separate or to divorce, that it will be difficult for you.**

Expect that, prior to and when you talk to your children, you will feel strong feelings such as: feeling apprehensive, feeling a sense of trepidation, and feeling uneasy and nervous. Allow yourself to feel your feelings. If you are able to, be kind to yourself and accept that it is normal and natural to feel these feelings. Give yourself permission to be “human” and real.

## **3. It is okay to express and show your feelings.**

It is okay to express your true feelings in front of your children, as long as you are able to contain and own your feelings. Use your discretion and common sense.

Know that your children may become frightened when witnessing your feelings, if they are strong and negative [e.g., anger or hostility]. Most children, though, can handle seeing your softer, underlying feelings – tears, sadness, hurt, and pain.

For example, you may wish to start by saying something like, “...this is very hard and scary for me/us to talk about, and it probably is for you too...”

## **4. Be brief and sincere.**

It is preferable to keep your talk [“speech”] brief, direct, and clear. Avoid long explanations. Know that most kids tend to tune-out when adults provide lengthy explanations and “speeches”.

## **5. Adjust your words to the age-appropriate level of your children.**

Do your best to talk about your plan to separate or divorce in terms that your child can grasp and understand. In general, younger children comprehend concrete terms and examples better than the abstract ideas and words.

**6.** Allow your children the space, time, and opportunity to absorb what you say and to feel their feelings.

**7.** Remember that each child is unique.

Anticipate that you may receive different reactions from each child. Some children may initially feel shocked and surprised. Others may have sensed that this was coming for some time, and be less reactive.

**8.** Expect that your children may experience strong and intense reactions.

Some children keep their feelings more inside, and others tend to be more externally and verbally expressive. Most children will, however, react strongly with feelings ranging from outrage and anger, to discomfort and confusion.

**9.** Acknowledge and validate what your children are feeling and where they are at.

Refer to my articles on listening – “Nourish your Child with the Gift of Listening” series – for more detailed information on this topic.

**10.** Prepare for lots of questions and concerns from your children.

Answer as best and honestly as you can, and realize that sometimes the best answer you can give your child is an “I don’t know”.

**11.** Honor and respect your children’s individual needs.

Some children may wish to be with you; some children may wish to spend some time on their own; some children may cope better by being with their friends.

**12.** Expect and know that no matter what you say and do, that your child may feel and believe that they are responsible and to blame for your separation and divorce.

Realize, and this may be obvious, that this is the beginning of what will likely be an ongoing series of discussions with your children. This is the beginning of a process of adjusting and readjusting to your new family situation.