

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tips on Parenting after a Separation or Divorce

If you have recently gone through a separation or divorce, you have likely come through a period of conflict and sadness and may be concerned about your children and how they will respond to the changes in their life.

It may help to be reminded that, in general, children are remarkably resilient and flexible and once they are past the initial trauma, they usually ease into their new lives.

Tips to Help You and Your Child Adjust

No matter how civilized your particular separation may have been, you have lived through an emotionally intense period. You likely have some grieving to do over the loss of an important relationship. It is important that you allow room for your emotions and time to recover and build your physical strength for the challenges that lie ahead.

- Remind yourself that it is okay to feel angry, guilty or sad. These are all normal feelings and you need to allow yourself to feel them before you can release them.
- Take time to treat yourself. Have a massage. Join a gym. Enjoy a leisurely bath.
- Accept the help that is offered. Your family and close friends will feel better for helping you, so accept their invitations to baby sit, cook, run errands or lunch.
- If some old friends seem to have moved over to your ex-partner's side, accept that it happens. Move on and make new friends!
- If you can possibly avoid it, don't rush into making long-term decisions. Some quick changes are inevitable but delay everything else. Give yourself time to adapt and get over the past before you move on to a totally new life.

Begin to Build a New Relationship with Your Ex-Partner

Too many couples try to drag on the dynamics of the old relationship and end up bringing the conflicts along with them.

- **Accept that the old relationship is over.** Concentrate on building a brand new parenting relationship as two people who care about the same child/children.
- **Be civilized and courteous to each other.** Try to forget old wounds.
- **Offer the respect and privileges that your ex-partner deserves** as the parent of your child.
- **Keep communication flowing.** Give your ex-partner full and proper access.
- **If a civilized, respectful relationship is impossible, avoid contact whenever possible.** Allow the ex-partner full access to their child but arrange for pick-up and drop-off at times when you won't need to meet each other, such as directly from school or day care.

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- **Inform the school of the separation.** Ensure your ex-partner will receive copies of all important school communications, including school reports and invitations to parent-teacher conferences.

Helping Your Child Adjust

Now is the time to ensure that you and your ex-partner keep communication fully open with your child.

- Make sure your children know the separation is not their fault in any way.
- Reiterate that you and your ex-spouse still love the child as much as ever. Explain that you are divorcing each other but that neither of you are divorcing your child/children.
- Never speak ill of your ex-partner in front of your child, even if you have to bite your tongue!
- Try to reinstate routine and structure in your child's life to help your child feel secure.
- Make sure your child's school or daycare is aware of the changes in his or her life. Ask to be quickly informed if they notice any behavioral changes.
- Many decisions have inevitably had to be made without your children's involvement and often, without even their knowledge. It's important to try to restore some feeling of control. Involve them in some decision-making. Let them choose how to decorate a new bedroom, for example, or what to pack to visit the other parent, which pizza to order or what clothes to wear.
- Answer your children's questions as fully and honestly as possible. Tell them where you will live, where they will go to school, how often visits to the other parent will occur and where they will take place.
- Listen, listen, listen! Encourage your children to talk about their feelings. Ensure your children understand the unconditional love you will always offer.

How's Your Kid Coping? Signs to Watch for

If you or others are noticing some of the following behaviors, it may be a sign that your child isn't coping as well as they could:

- Young children may regress to old habits such as thumb sucking, bed-wetting, aggression and temper tantrums.
- School aged children can start to lie more often or concoct stories to explain the situation to themselves and others—denial is a common defense against the pain they are feeling.
- Children complain of vague health problems-headaches, stomach aches, etc. This is part of how they are trying to cope with stress and powerful emotions.
- Older children may withdraw from friends and family or stop functioning at school, or conversely, they may throw themselves into relationships and work as a way of gaining approval and acceptance.
- Kids become angry and violent or sad and withdrawn, or alternately, internalize their feelings or try to harm themselves.

By keeping a close eye on your children's responses to the divorce, you can give them the support they need or access outside resources to help. If you are ever concerned that your child is a danger to themselves or others, seek professional help immediately.

Children need stability and consistency in their lives. Life changes are a shock to the system, but your children are resilient and can cope with the right guidance. By creating routine and structure in daily life, and by making a concerted effort to work together and communicate with your ex-spouse, you and your children will travel the road to your new life with as few bumps as possible.